

Preventing and Caring for Wounds for Patients with Diabetes

Daily inspection of skin is key in preventing wounds that won't heal



Vascular Surgeon Walter Kwass MD, medical director of the Wound Care and Hyperbaric Center at Holy Family Hospital at Merrimack Valley in Haverhill, examines a wound on a patient's foot

The best wound care is care that prevents a wound from starting. If you have diabetes, thorough inspection of your skin, especially legs and feet, might be the best protection against a wound that won't heal. Performed daily, it helps find cuts, scrapes or scratches in their earliest stages, and treating them right away, is the best way to prevent infection.

Don't soak your feet.

"I tell patients not to ever soak their feet," said Podiatrist Debra Eisner, DPM. "Soaking your feet softens the skin, making it more permeable and susceptible to cuts and infection."

Named a Center of Excellence four years in a row by Healogics, the Wound Care and Hyperbaric Center, led by Vascular Surgeon Walter Kwass, MD, is distinguished by its multidisciplinary team of dedicated doctors and nurses.

The Wound Care and Hyperbaric Center uses the most up-to-date approaches and remains current in new scientific advances. Hyperbaric oxygen chambers deliver pure oxygen under pressure to patients so their blood plasma becomes more saturated, carrying 20 to 30 times the normal amount of oxygen to tissues. This allows the body's natural wound healing mechanisms to function more efficiently and continued use increases the body's immune and healing response.

Many patients at the Center discover their wounds, which resisted healing after months and even years of traditional treatment, finally heal.

Diabetes can cause nerve damage known as diabetic neuropathy, making it difficult for people to even to feel a cut is present. Diabetes can also cause plaque buildup in blood vessels, creating poor blood supply.

If you find a cut, wash it with soap and water right away, and if your physician approves, use antibiotic cream or ointment, and then cover it with a sterile bandage. Avoid using irritants such as alcohol, iodine and antiseptics, and don't wear tight fitting shoes (if the cut is on the foot), or tight fitting clothing, to avoid rubbing and irritation.

To ensure the wound stays clean, keep it covered, and inspect it daily to monitor whether it's healing or getting worse. If it's not getting smaller or forming a scab within two days, see your doctor because when people have diabetes, wounds don't always get better. Due to poor circulation and decreased ability to fight infection, a small cut can become something much worse very quickly.

If it becomes hot to the touch, red or swollen, painful, or has a discharge such as pus, and has not started to close or scab within two days, call your doctor.

A small cut can become a large wound that might need to be treated with surgery, or in severe cases, amputation. Open wounds, such as ulcers, can become so deep that bacteria can actually get into the bloodstream causing life-threatening conditions.

Named A Center of Excellence Four Years in a Row

The Wound Care & Hyperbaric Center at Holy Family Hospital at Merrimack Valley in Haverhill has earned the Robert A. Warriner III, MD, Center of Excellence national award for the fourth year in a row (2012-2015), making it one of only seven centers nationwide to receive this distinction.

For more information or to make an appointment, please call 978-420-1405.

