

Foot Care after Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)

Feet without normal feeling need special care.

Inspect your feet every day

- **Look at and feel your feet every day.** Use a long-handled mirror (this may need to be modified for grip) to see the bottom of your feet. A caregiver may need to do this for you if you are unable to do it on your own.
- **What to look for?**
 - Changes in skin color (usually redness with lighter skin, darker than normal with dark skin color)
 - Cracks or open sores, thickened skin (callous), change in temperature or texture.
 - If you have callouses or blisters, it suggests you have pressure or shearing (friction) occurring and wounds can develop.

What to do if there is a change in your skin

- Try to identify the cause.
 - Is spasticity causing friction or shearing?
 - How is the fit of your shoe?
 - Is your foot flat on the wheelchair foot plate? If your foot is not flat on the wheelchair foot plate, this causes unequal pressure on areas of the foot.
- Call your health care provider if you have a color change, hot spots, a callous, blister, sore or cracks that do not go away within two days.

Basic daily cleansing and care

- Wash your feet with soap and water.
- Dry your feet and between your toes.
- Apply moisturizing cream if your skin is dry. DO NOT put cream between the toes.

Wear proper-fitting shoes and clean socks every day.

Nail care

- Soak your feet first so your toenails are easier to cut.
- Trim nails straight across with clippers; do not use razor blades, knives, or scissors.
- File nails smooth after trimming.

Pressure prevention

- Wear off-loading boots or splints in bed to prevent pressure on the heel and ankle.
- Wear properly fitted shoes when you are out of bed to protect your feet. You may need a shoe that is one or two sizes larger than you wore before your SCI. Put your hand into the shoe to check, and be sure nothing is in the shoe before putting it on.

Manage edema (swelling)

Edema is a symptom of poor circulation and can cause skin breakdown or make it difficult for wounds to heal. Edema is common after SCI because of so much time spent sitting with feet in a dependent (hanging down) position and loss of muscle activity.

If your feet, ankles or legs are swollen (this may include swelling in the ankle and up the leg):

- You may need to wear compression hose (sometimes called anti-embolic hose), socks or wraps. Make sure they fit properly. Wear them during the day and take them off at night when you are in bed. This can keep your feet and legs from swelling during the day and improve the blood circulation from your legs.
- Some people cannot use compression hose and garments because their legs or feet are too swollen to pull them on or wear safely without pinching or constricting blood flow. In this case, elastic ACE bandage wraps can be helpful. For step-by-step video instruction on applying ACE wraps, review the following link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJUVnT65Q30&feature=youtu.be>

Prevent foot deformity

Feet can become deformed and misshapen after SCI because of tightened tendons and muscles in the ankle and heel. To avoid this, make sure you do the following:

- Do range of motion daily.
- Wear shoes.
- Wear nighttime foot splints, or position your foot and ankle in bed with pillows to prevent a dropped foot position.

Work with a podiatrist

Some people with SCI see a podiatrist for monthly foot and nail care. You should see a podiatrist if you have ingrown toenails or foot deformities.

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Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace the advice from a medical professional. You should consult your health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatment.

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