

Skin Care and Infections

Diabetes can affect every part of the body, even the skin. In fact, skin problems are sometimes the first sign that a person has diabetes. Most skin problems can be prevented or treated easily if you catch them right away.

Some of these problems are skin conditions anyone can have, but people with diabetes have a higher risk. These include bacterial infections, fungal infections, and itching.

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How Does Managing My Diabetes Change My Risk for Skin Problems?

Keeping your diabetes well-managed helps prevent skin problems. High blood glucose levels can increase your risk of infection by:

- Pulling water from the skin, making it dry and more likely to crack. This can allow germs to enter.
- Causing blood vessels close to the skin to narrow or clog.
- Causing nerve damage over time which affects your ability to feel wounds. This also can decrease the amount you sweat, causing dry skin.
- Lowering your ability to fend off harmful bacteria.

What Can I Do to Prevent Skin Problems?

There are several things you can do to prevent skin problems:

- Keep your diabetes well-managed.
- Keep skin clean and dry. Use talcum powder in areas where skin touches skin, such as the armpits and groin.
- Avoid very hot baths and showers. If your skin is dry, don't use bubble oils. Moisturizing soaps may help. Afterward, use a standard skin lotion, but don't put lotions between toes. Extra moisture there would help fungus grow.
- Prevent dry skin. Scratching dry or itchy skin can open it up to infection. Moisturize your skin to prevent chapping, especially in cold or windy weather.



- Treat cuts right away. Wash minor cuts with soap and water. Only use an antibiotic cream or ointment if your doctor says it's okay. Cover minor cuts with sterile gauze. See a doctor right away if you get a major cut, burn, or infection.

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- During cold, dry months, keep your home more humid. Bathe less during this weather, if possible.
- Use mild shampoos.
- Do not use feminine hygiene sprays.
- Take good care of your feet:
 - Check them every day for sores and cuts.
 - Wear broad, flat shoes that fit well.
 - Check your shoes for foreign objects before putting them on.

What are the most common skin infections?

Bacterial Infections

Staph bacteria is the most common and serious type of bacteria.

These infections can spread into the skin and become quite serious. Antibiotics are used to treat infections.

Several kinds of bacterial infections occur in people with diabetes:

- Styes (infections of the eyelid)
- Boils
- Folliculitis (infections of the hair follicles)
- Carbuncles (deep infections of the skin and the tissue underneath)
- Infections around the nails

Fungal Infections

Most fungal infections in people with diabetes are caused by *Candida albicans*. This yeast-like fungus can create itchy rashes of moist, red areas surrounded by tiny blisters and scales. These infections occur in warm, moist areas such as between your toes, in the groin, and under the breasts.

Untreated fungal infections can be dangerous because they allow more serious bacterial infections to enter the body.

Types of fungal infections include:

- Yeast
- Jock itch
- Athlete's foot
- Ringworm

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Talk to your doctor or dermatologist (skin doctor) if you are not able to solve a skin problem yourself.