For **ALL** people with diabetes, the complications of this disease are very real! Along with heart, kidney and nerve disease, complications also include foot and eye problems that can lead to lower limb amputation and vision loss.

When it comes to complications, it doesn’t matter what type of diabetes you have. Whether you are treated with lifestyle only (diet and exercise), insulin or diabetes pills, the complications of diabetes can be very upsetting.

Preventing complications is as easy as taking a few simple steps to find and treat problems early. Take an active role in your diabetes care. Learn as much as you can about your disease. Prevent the development and progression of complications by having regular eye and foot exams. Act early on possible problems!

**FOOT PROBLEMS**

In people with diabetes, circulation to the feet can be decreased, leading to slow healing and risk of infection. Nerve damage may also make the feet less sensitive to hot, cold, or pain. For these reasons, people with diabetes are at increased risk for **serious foot problems**.

In Nova Scotia, more than 70% of all non-traumatic lower limb amputations happen to people with diabetes. The good news is that more than half of these problems can be prevented with proper care and education!

**Prevention Tips:**

1. **Check** your feet **DAILY** (look at the tops, bottoms, sides, and between the toes). Look for any changes and breaks in the skin. Report any problems to your doctor or other health care provider. These problems include:
   - corns/calluses/blisters/plantar warts
   - dry skin/cracks
   - cuts/sores that do not heal
   - in-grown toe nails
   - swelling
   - reddened areas/bruising
   - changes in the shape of your foot/toes
   - broken skin between the toes
   - changes in color and/or temperature

2. Have your feet **assessed** at least **YEARLY** by a qualified health professional. This person can identify your risk for developing foot problems and provide you with the education and prevent further problems. If you are at high risk for foot problems (for example, you have open cracks, sores, infection, history of ulcers or an amputation) have your feet examined more often by a qualified health professional.

3. Protect your feet with proper footwear.

4. Wash your feet daily. **DO NOT SOAK.** Avoid extremes in water temperature. Avoid harsh chemicals and abrasives on your skin such as medicated corn plasters.

5. Ask your doctor, Diabetes Centre staff or other health care provider about local foot care clinics.

**Developed by:**

**Diabetes Care Program of Nova Scotia**

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In people with diabetes, retinopathy (diabetes eye disease) is caused by changes in the small blood vessels in the retina (the back of the eye). Retinal blood vessels may swell and weaken resulting in leakage or growth of new blood vessels and other changes. For these reasons, people with diabetes are at increased risk for vision loss.

Diabetic retinopathy is a leading cause of blindness and occurs at an even higher rate in First Nations people in Canada. **Diabetic eye disease can be treated before vision loss occurs!**

In the early stages of retinopathy, you may have normal vision, blurred vision, or changing vision. **Don't wait for signs before you do something.** Remember, it can progress a long way without any warning signs.

**Prevention Tips:**

1. The key to preventing diabetic eye disease is to find and treat the diabetes before it causes vision loss or blindness. This is the best way to control diabetic eye disease. So, if you have Type 1 diabetes, make sure you get a **dilated eye exam (using eye drops) once a year**. If you have Type 2 diabetes, have your dilated eye exam every **one to two years** as recommended by your eye care professional. Eye drops and dilated eye exams enlarge your pupils and allow the eye care professional to see more of the inside of your eye and can uncover the presence of cataracts and glaucoma. These are other diseases of the eye that people with diabetes are at increased risk for developing.

2. Report any symptoms, such as cloudiness in your vision, blind spots, or floaters, immediately to your eye doctor.

3. People with diabetes in Nova Scotia are eligible for **free** dilated eye exams at least every two years. If you have Type 1 diabetes, or signs of retinopathy, you may be eligible for annual dilated eye exams. For more information regarding eligibility, call MSI at 902-496-7008 or toll-free 1-800-563-8880.

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**Reduce Your Risk of Developing Diabetes Complications**

- If you smoke, quit! If you don’t smoke, don’t start!
- Take good care of yourself – eat healthy, be active, and take your pills or insulin as recommended.
- Take very good care of your diabetes. This includes your blood pressure, blood glucose and blood fats (lipids).
- Test your blood glucose as directed by your health care provider.
- Make regular visits to your doctor and Diabetes Centre.
- Have a regular dilated eye exam for retinopathy.
- Have your feet examined by a qualified health professional at least once a year and more often if recommended.
- Love your feet and eyes...treat them with care!

Graphics adapted with permission from the American Diabetes Association.