

Useful Contact Numbers & Organisations

Burns Outreach Team

Tel: 0161 291 6317

Diabetes UK

www.diabetes.org.uk

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How to prevent burns if you have diabetic neuropathy

Manchester Burn Care Service



What is diabetic neuropathy?

Diabetic neuropathy is nerve damage caused by diabetes. Peripheral neuropathy is the most common type of neuropathy and damages the nerves of the hands and feet. It is more common in the feet.

What are the symptoms of diabetic neuropathy?

- Numbness which means you cannot feel pain or changes in temperature,
- tingling, burning or prickling feelings,
- sharp pains,
- extreme sensitivity to touch, even light touch,
- loss of balance or coordination.

Why are you more likely to burn yourself if you have diabetic neuropathy?

You are more likely to burn yourself as you cannot feel pain and extremes of temperature. If you come into contact with something hot, like an electric fire, you are less likely to move away because you will not feel it burning.

What type of burns do people with diabetic neuropathy develop?

- Burns from coming into contact with a fire, heater, radiator, hot water bottle, microwaveable wheat bag, electric blanket or oven.
- Scalds from putting your hands or feet into water that was too hot.

Why is preventing burns so important with diabetic neuropathy?

Prevention and early detection of burns is important to prevent complications like infection. Burns may go unnoticed because of the lack of feeling, and healing may take a long time. If this is the case you may need an operation and in extreme cases this may lead to an amputation.

How to prevent burns?

1. Set your hot water temperature no higher than 120F / 49C.
2. Test the water temperature with your elbow or forearm or a thermometer before stepping into a bath.
3. Wash your feet daily, using warm (not hot) water and unperfumed soap. Dry your feet carefully with a soft towel, especially between your toes.
4. Avoid using hot water bottles and microwaveable wheat bags. Wear socks if your feet are cold.
5. To avoid friction burns, wear shoes that have a fastening and fit your feet well and allow your toes to move. New shoes should be worn for an hour each day, gradually increase the time over two weeks.
6. Avoid walking barefoot, especially on hot sand or hot pavements.
7. Wear oven gloves when using the oven.

It is important to examine your hands and feet daily for any burns or infections.

If you do notice a burn, contact your GP, District Nurse or local Accident and Emergency Department.