Vascular Disease and Skin Care

If you have vascular disease, check your skin every day for skin changes. Check your legs, feet, toes and other areas of the body where you have vascular problems. Use this handout to help you protect your skin.

Ways to Protect Your Skin

To protect your skin:

- **Dress in layers to protect skin** and to avoid exposure to hot or cold temperatures. For example, wear pants or long skirts instead of shorts.

- **Wear cotton socks and well-fitting shoes.** Do not go barefoot or wear shoes that rub areas the skin.

- **Wash your skin with a mild soap and warm water.** Always check the water with your hand or elbow first to avoid getting burned. Gently pat dry skin. Do not rub the surface.

- **Exercise regularly** to improve blood flow.

- **Check skin for dryness or cracks.** Use lotion that has lanolin and does not contain alcohol.

Foot Care

Keep your feet healthy:

- Have your doctor check your feet at every visit. Visit a foot specialist, called a podiatrist, if if recommended by your vascular doctor.

- Check the top and bottom, sides and heels, toes and toe nails, and between each toe when doing foot care.

More on next page ➔

Learn more about your health care.
If you are able to cut your own toenails, cut the nail straight across and file with an emery board to the shape of the toe. If toenails are thick or hard, cut the nails after a bath or shower when the nails are softer.

To avoid causing foot injury:
- **Do not** cut nails too short as this can lead to an ingrown toenail.
- **Do not** cut corns or calluses on the feet.
- **Do not** soak feet which can dry out the skin.
- **Do not** use heating pads or space heaters near the feet which can dry out skin.
- **Do not** use harsh chemicals on your skin.

### Wound Healing

Wounds take longer to heal when you have vascular disease. You are also at greater risk for infection when you get wounds. Use this chart to learn what a wound looks like and to know when to visit the doctor for help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wound level</th>
<th>How skin or wound looks:</th>
<th>Your risk of infection is:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Skin may be red, itch, hurt, feel spongy or very firm to the touch. The soreness goes away after pressure is relieved.</td>
<td>Low. If the skin does not heal or improve within 24 hours, then call your doctor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Skin looks like a blister or open sore.</td>
<td>Low to moderate. <strong>Visit your doctor for treatment.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Open wound that is going deeper into the skin, like a crater.</td>
<td>Moderate. <strong>Visit your doctor for treatment.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Very deep open wound. May be able to see muscle or bone.</td>
<td>High. <strong>Visit your doctor for treatment.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have any concerns about how a wound is healing, call your doctor or schedule a visit for treatment.
When You Get a Cut or Scrape

If you get a cut or wound, here are tips to protect your health:

- Wash your hands first with soap and water for 15 seconds to avoid getting germs into the wound.
- Wash the cut gently with soap and warm water. Pat dry with a clean towel.
- Cover the area with a Band-Aid or gauze dressing. If using gauze, wrap several thin layers of gauze around the area. Tape the top layer of gauze to the bottom layers. Do not tape the gauze directly to your skin.
- Check the wound for signs of infection or drainage several times a day.

If you get a cut or scrape and it is bleeding,

- Wash your hands first with soap and water for 15 seconds to avoid getting germs into the wound.
- Wash the cut or scraped area gently with soap and water.
- Apply gentle but firm pressure with a clean cloth for several minutes.
  Do not wipe at the cut.
- When the bleeding has stopped, apply a topical antibiotic ointment and cover with a dressing to keep the area clean.

Call your doctor and report the wound. You may need to have treatment. Do not try to treat wounds by yourself if you have vascular disease.

If you have any sign of foot infection or injury, call your vascular disease doctor, such as:

- Redness, pus
- Bleeding
- Wound or sore
- Dryness or cracking
- Blisters
- Ingrown toenails

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.