

## **N-11 Diabetic Toe Nail Trimming**

Purpose: To provide guidance for trimming toe nails of residents with diabetes to prevent infection and injury to soft tissue.

A person with diabetes is more vulnerable to foot problems because the disease can damage the nerves and reduce blood flow to the feet. The poor blood circulation slows wound healing, and the nerve damage can cause numbness, burning, pain, coldness, or tingling. Without sensation, a cut may be unnoticed and lead to infection.

Only a skilled nurse (with foot care training) or a podiatrist trims diabetic toe nails.

Each day the feet should be inspected. Assess condition of feet, toes, and toe nails, including the color and temperature. Inspect all surfaces of the nails.

Clean socks or stockings should be worn daily. The inside of shoes should be checked for foreign objects, like pebbles. After bathing, feet should be dried, especially between the toes, and lotion applied for dry, flaky feet.

### Toe nail trimming:

Equipment for trimming includes a basin for warm water, nail clippers, emery board or nail file, disposable gloves, towel, and orange stick.

Procedure for toe nail trimming:

1. Inspect all surfaces of each foot. Check in between toes and around nail beds to detect early skin breakdown. Compare feet for skin integrity, color, and temperature.
2. Feet may be soaked in basin filled with warm, soapy water for 5 minutes before trimming the nails. Soaking softens the nails and allows them to be trimmed and cleaned easily. Test the water to make sure that it is not too hot. Gently wash each foot on all surfaces.
3. Thoroughly dry each foot including between toes. Excess moisture leads to skin breakdown, and possibly to fungal infection.
4. Perform nail care if allowed per Home policy and resident risks. Improper nail care can lead to non-healing injuries, including the potential for amputation in residents with impaired circulation.
5. Cuticles may be gently pushed back with orange stick.
6. Use a toe nail clipper to clip nails straight across, if the nails are not too thick. Cutting straight across prevents formation of sharp nail spikes that can irritate nail margins. Nails that are trimmed too short or the edges are rounded (not straight) may curl downward and grow into the skin.
7. Take time to trim toe nails slowly, avoiding the corners of the nails which could lead to tissue damage. Don't trim the nails too short.
8. Use an emery board or nail file to smooth the nail edges.
9. After all nails have been trimmed, apply lotion lightly to lubricate dry feet and retain moisture.

References: Diabetic foot care training video is presented by podiatrist Ava Roberts for Alaska Pioneer Home in 2011.

N-11 Approved: 4/17/2012