

## Diabetic foot care/problems

### Why Is Diabetic Foot Care Important?

According to the American Diabetes Association, about 15.7 million people (5.9 percent of the United States population) have diabetes. Nervous system damage (also called neuropathy) affects about 60 to 70 percent of people with diabetes and is a major complication that may cause diabetics to lose feeling in their feet or hands.

Foot problems are a big risk in diabetics. Diabetics must constantly monitor their feet or face severe consequences, including amputation. With a diabetic foot, a wound as small as a blister from wearing a shoe that's too tight can cause a lot of damage. Diabetes decreases blood flow, so injuries are slow to heal. When your wound is not healing, it's at risk for infection. As a diabetic, your infections spread quickly. If you have diabetes, you should inspect your feet every day. Look for puncture wounds, bruises, pressure areas, redness, warmth, blisters, ulcers, scratches, cuts and nail problems. If necessary, get someone to help you, or use a mirror.



### Here's some basic advice for taking care of your feet:

- Always keep your feet warm.
- Don't get your feet wet in the rain.
- Don't put your feet on radiators or in front of the fireplace.
- Don't smoke or sit cross-legged. Both decrease blood supply to your feet.
- Don't soak your feet.
- Don't use antiseptic solutions, drugstore medications, heating pads or sharp instruments on your feet.
- Trim your toenails straight across. Avoid cutting the corners. Use a nail file or emery board. If you find an ingrown toenail, contact our office.
- Use quality lotion to keep the skin of your feet soft and moist, but don't put any lotion between your toes.
- Wash your feet every day with mild soap and warm water.
- Wear loose socks to bed.
- Wear warm socks and shoes in winter.
- When drying your feet, pat each foot with a towel and be careful between your toes.
- Buy shoes that are comfortable without a "breaking in" period. Check how your shoe fits in width, length, back, bottom of heel, and sole. Avoid pointed-toe styles and high heels. Try to get shoes made with leather upper material and deep toe boxes. Wear new shoes

for only two hours or less at a time. Don't wear the same pair every day. Inspect the inside of each shoe before putting it on.

- Don't lace your shoes too tightly or loosely.
- Choose socks and stockings carefully. Wear clean, dry socks every day. Avoid socks with holes or wrinkles. Thin cotton socks are more absorbent for summer wear. Square-toes socks will not squeeze your toes. Avoid stockings with elastic tops.

When your feet become numb, they are at risk for becoming deformed. One way this happens is through ulcers. Open sores may become infected. Another way is the bone condition Charcot (pronounced "sharko") foot. This is one of the most serious foot problems you can face. It warps the shape of your foot when your bones fracture and disintegrate, and yet you continue to walk on it because it doesn't hurt. Diabetic foot ulcers and early phases of Charcot fractures can be treated with a total contact cast.

The shape of your foot molds the cast. It lets your ulcer heal by distributing weight and relieving pressure. If you have Charcot foot, the cast controls your foot's movement and supports its contours if you don't put any weight on it. To use a total contact cast, you need good blood flow in your foot. The cast is changed every week or two until your foot heals. A custom-walking boot is another way to treat your Charcot foot. It supports the foot until all the swelling goes down, which can take as long as a year. You should keep from putting your weight on the Charcot foot. Surgery is considered if your deformity is too severe for a brace or shoe.

Diabetes is a lifelong chronic disease that is caused by high levels of sugar in the blood. It can also decrease your body's ability to fight off infections, which is especially harmful in your feet. When diabetes is not properly controlled, damage can occur to the organs and impairment of the immune system is also likely to occur.

With damage to your nervous system, you may not be able to feel your feet properly. Normal sweat secretion and oil production that lubricates the skin of the foot is impaired, which can lead to an abnormal pressure on the skin, bones, and joints of the foot during walking and other activities. This can even lead to the breakdown of the skin of the foot, which often causes sores to develop. If you have diabetes, it is important to prevent foot problems before they occur, recognize problems early, and seek the right treatment when a problem does happen.

### **Diabetic Complications and Your Feet**

When it comes to your feet, there are several risk factors that can increase your chances of developing foot problems and diabetic infections in the legs and feet. First of all, poorly fitting shoes are one of the biggest culprits of diabetic foot complications. If you have red spots, sore spots, blisters, corns, calluses, or consistent pain associated with wearing shoes, new proper fitted shoes must be obtained immediately. Additionally, if you have common foot abnormalities such as flat feet, bunions, or hammertoes, prescription shoes or orthotics from your podiatrist may be necessary to further protect your feet from other damage.

People who have long-standing or poorly controlled diabetes are also at risk for having damage to the nerves in their feet, which is known in the medical community as peripheral neuropathy. If

you have nerve damage, you may not be able to feel your feet normally and you may also be unable to sense the position of your feet and toes while walking and balancing, which can cause even more harm to your feet.

Normal nerves allow people to sense if their shoes are too tight or if their shoes are rubbing on the feet too much. With diabetes, you may not be able to properly sense minor injuries, such as cuts, scrapes and blisters-all signs of abnormal wear, tear, and foot strain. The following can also compromise the health of your feet:

- Poor circulation
- Trauma to the foot
- Infections
- Smoking

Diabetes can be extremely dangerous to your feet, so take precautions now. You can avoid serious problems such as losing a toe, foot, or leg by following proper prevention techniques offered by Dr. Williams. Remember, prevention is the key to saving your feet and eliminating pain.