

STEINBERG PODIATRY ASSOCIATES, P.A.

THE DIABETIC FOOT

Diabetes mellitus is a multifaceted disease which affects your foot health. Foot problems are a leading cause of hospitalization for people with diabetes mellitus. Foot infections are responsible for more hospital days than any other complication of diabetes. Most of these hospitalizations are preventable.

One of the most common effects of diabetes in the lower extremity is neuropathy, an altered sensation to the extremities. This typically involves the feet and can present as burning, stinging, numbness, pins and needles, or the sensation of having slept on an arm. Typically, people have the most discomfort in the evening. The pain of neuropathy can sometimes be relieved by topical applications of creams or lotions. The most common medications used for this contain A Capsaicin@ which is in part a hot pepper extract. A small amount of the medicine should be applied to a test spot before use. This medication should be applied either with an applicator bottle or with a gloved hand, to avoid irritation to sensitive parts of the body such as your eyes. There are several of these products available over the counter including AZostrix@, ACapsin@, AAspercream@. For neuropathy pain which is not responsive to this treatment, there are other medications available by prescription.

The altered sensation of the nerves may in time change to numbness. Without this protective sense, excessive pressure while walking or standing is not detected. To avoid excess pressure, prescription orthotics, or custom inner soles, are sometimes used in the shoes of diabetics to accommodate for the pressure. Corn pads which attach with adhesive tape backings should be used very cautiously as they may weaken the skin with prolonged use. Medicated corn or callus removers should be avoided. They contain an acid which can be harmful, especially to diabetics. Altered temperature sensation can also be present. To avoid injury, hot water bottles, heating pads, and even ice should not be used, unless ordered by a physician. Diabetics are cautioned not to soak their feet. Prolonged soaking weakens the skin, making it more susceptible to infection. A moisturizing cream or lotion can be used following a bath, or shower, but avoid between the toes.

Diabetes affects the micro-circulation. Sores often heal slower in diabetics, leaving them susceptible to infection. To counteract this, it is recommended that diabetics inspect their feet daily for blisters, bleeding, or sores between the toes. Early detection and treatment are crucial in healing these sores. Often the only sign of a developing infection is unexplained high blood sugar. To aid in early detection, it is recommended that diabetics wear white cotton socks. By examining the socks on removal, blood or drainage can be seen. In extreme cases, diabetics can step on pins or other sharp objects without feeling it. For this reason, it is recommended that shoes or house slippers be worn at all times. Since feet may swell during the day, new shoes should be purchased late in the day. Soft leather walking, running, or athletic shoes easily adapt to the shape of your feet and allow them to breathe. New shoes should be worn for only a few hours at first, with careful inspection of your feet for any new irritations. In some instances, prescription orthopaedic shoes may be ordered. Walking in moderation is good exercise and

improves circulation. If you notice that your feet swell, try elevating and exercising your feet and legs during the day. Avoid sitting with your legs down or crossed. This can impede blood flow in and out of the foot.

These simple measures can prevent foot complications with diabetes:

- 1) Avoid excessive standing.
- 2) Avoid walking long distances.
- 3) Avoid over-the-counter corn or callus removers.
- 4) Have your nails and calluses evaluated by your doctor.
- 5) Wear shoes or house slippers at all times.
- 6) Inspect your feet daily.
- 7) Use caution with extreme temperatures.
- 8) Report any foot concerns to your doctor.