

Common Foot Problems associated with Diabetes Mellitus can be Avoided with these Simple Tips:

- Avoid excessive standing
- Avoid walking long distances
- Avoid over the counter corn or callus removers
- Have your nails and calluses treated by a Podiatrist
- Wear shoes or house slippers at all times
- Inspect your feet daily
- Wear white cotton socks
- Test temperature of bath water using your elbow
- Report any foot concerns to your Podiatrist or Medical Doctor

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Diabetes mellitus is a multifaceted disease which affects your foot health. Foot problems are a leading cause of hospitalization for people with diabetes mellitus. It is estimated that 15% of all diabetics will develop a serious foot condition at some time in their lives. Foot infections are responsible for more hospital days than any other complication of diabetes. Most of these hospitalizations are preventable through regular visits to a Podiatrist.

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, spreading upward to knees, and then the hands. This 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. Even the pressure of the sheets may become uncomfortable and inhibit the ability to sleep. The pain of neuropathy can sometimes be relieved by topical applications of creams or lotions. The most common medications used for this contain capsaicin which is in part a hot pepper extract. This medication is not tolerated by all patients. It works by creating its own type of burning sensation which is sometimes uncomfortable. For this reason a small amount of the medicine should be applied to a test spot before use. Patients who get past the initial sensation of the medication are recommended to use a six-week trial course of the medication for evaluation of its effect. This medication should be applied either with an applicator bottle or with a gloved hand, to avoid irritation to other more sensitive parts of the body such as your eyes. There are several of these products available over the counter. They can be applied up to four times daily. For neuropathy pain which is not responsive to this treatment there are other medications available from your doctor with a prescription which may be tried. These range from pain medications to very low doses of antidepressant medications.

The pain of neuropathy is often self limiting. The altered sensation of the nerves may in time change to numbness. This can present a problem, as numb feet are unable to detect pain. Without this protective sense, excessive pressure while walking or standing is not detected. A person without neuropathy alters their stance often to avoid excessive pressure in one spot just as one might sit down to rest their feet after walking a certain distance. To avoid excess pressure

orthotic devices are sometimes placed in the shoes of diabetics to accommodate for the pressure. Corns or calluses, which can occur from this excessive pressure, should be treated by a Podiatrist. Over-the-counter corn or callus removers should be avoided. They contain an acid which can be harmful, especially to diabetics. In simple terms, corn removers do not know the difference between good skin and calluses. Corn pads which attach with adhesive tape backings should be used very cautiously as they may weaken the skin with prolonged use. Pads made of breathable material such as felt which do not stick on are preferable. Diabetics with altered or loss of sensation to their feet should not trim their own nails or calluses because they may not detect problems, which may be present. Diabetics are usually seen by a Podiatrist for prophylactic foot care three to four times a year. Regular visits to your Medical Doctor should include foot exams to aid in early detection of potential problems. Contact your Podiatrist or Medical Doctor immediately for any concerns between visits.

Altered temperature sensation can also occur, limiting your ability to notice bath water that is too hot. Diabetics are cautioned to test the water temperature with their elbow, not their hand as in severe cases it too may be affected. To avoid injury hot water bottles, heating pads, and even ice should not be used, unless ordered by a physician. Caution should also be exercised with car floor heaters. Feet should be washed daily with warm, soapy water, and dried well especially between the toes. Diabetic are cautioned not to soak their feet. Prolonged soaking weakens the skin making it more susceptible to infection. A moisturizing cream or lotion should be used following a bath, or shower, but avoid between the toes. Problem skin between toes should be treated by a Podiatrist. Sun exposure is another real concern. A sun screen should be used on the exposed portion of feet for any prolonged exposure. Injuries due to scalding or sun burns can result in blisters, or more severe ulcerations.

Diabetes affects the micro-circulation, small blood vessels to the eyes, hands, and feet. The decreased blood supply to the extremities can cause poor wound healing. 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. Use a mirror to see the bottom of the foot and heel. Since diabetes can affect vision, it is sometimes necessary to have someone else look at them. Early detection is very important in healing these sores. Often the only sign of a developing infection is unexplained high blood sugar. The first instance any sore is noted diabetics should seek medical attention. 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. Socks should not be so tight as to interfere with circulation and should not have any seams or folds which may cause lines or irritation. Avoid nylon or 100% synthetic materials. Cotton breathes best. In extreme cases diabetics can step on pins or other sharp objects without feeling it. For this reason it is recommended that you wear shoes or house slippers at all times. Shoes must fit comfortably with adequate width and depth for the toes. Soft leather walking, running, or athletic shoes easily adapt to the shape of your feet and allow them to breathe. Since, feet may swell during the day new shoes should be purchased late in the day. You should be able to wiggle all your toes freely within the shoe, there should be approximately 3/4" from the longest toe to the end of the shoe. Stores that have clerks to fit the shoes for you are often a help. New shoes should be worn for only a few hours at first, with careful inspection of your feet for any new irritations. Always check your shoes for foreign objects before putting them on. Walking in moderation is good exercise and improves

circulation, when there are no specific contraindications. Exercise should be utilized even if you are not able to get out and walk. This can be done from a seated position, practice moving your ankle as is you were applying and releasing the accelerator of an automobile. Another good exercise is to practice drawing your ABC=s with your foot. These exercises should be utilized any time you are sitting for a prolonged time, or resting in bed. If you notice that your feet swell, try elevating and exercising your feet during the day. Avoid sitting with your legs crossed. This can impede blood flow in and out of the foot.

While diabetes might seem like a lot to be concerned with, preventive measures can help avoid many of its potential complications. Recent studies have shown that tight control of blood sugar levels can prevent many of the complications associated with this disease. For this reason diabetics are encouraged to work closely with their Podiatrist, Medical Doctor, Endocrinologist, and Opthamologist.

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