

Diabetic Foot

If you have been diagnosed with diabetes, you will need to keep an eye on your feet going forward. Diabetic foot is really an umbrella term that encompasses any foot issues that result from the poor blood circulation and lack of feeling due to damaged nerves that come about as a result of being diabetic. If you do not already have a good podiatry doctor, once you are diagnosed with diabetes that should become a priority.

Symptoms

You'll know you have a diabetic foot if you have been diagnosed with diabetes, and you or your podiatrist find any of the following during regular routine exams, be it a self-exam at home or at the doctor's office:

- calluses, corns or other pressure points, especially with pain
- blisters
- bunions
- dry and cracking skin which can lead to infections
- ulcers, which are open wounds, usually on the bottom of the foot
- nail problems
- wounds or injuries that take longer than usual to heal
- redness, swelling, skin that is warm to the touch

Causes

Nerve impairment from diabetes means you have less feeling in your feet and may not feel or notice injuries or issues. When that happens, something small, like a blister for example, can become infected almost before you've even realized you have a blister. Secondly, you may be experiencing poor circulation. This means that good healthy oxygenated blood that would normally aid the healing process is not making its way to your injured foot. This can mean much longer healing times. Symptoms of poor circulation include swelling and very dry skin. Excellent foot care will be essential to your overall health as a diabetic, so you can catch problems as soon as they arise.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Treatment usually entails treating the issue, such as a small cut or a callus, immediately. Poor circulation will cause any type of issue with your feet to take longer to heal as it is; you shouldn't wait if you see something on your foot that causes pain or raises concern. Furthermore, if you leave anything suspicious or painful untreated, it could lead to serious infections that travel through your body, which become very

hard to treat, leading to surgery or even amputation. Here are some things you can do on your own to head off problems before they occur:

- Check your feet every day when you get up and again before you go to bed. You want to keep an eye out for any of the symptoms mentioned above, especially anything painful or bleeding. Diabetics can break bones and not realize it because of the lack of pain. Have someone else inspect the bottoms of your foot, or use a hand mirror if you must. Any little crack in the skin or tiny puncture wound from stepping on something can become a gateway for infection. Your foot specialist can show you how. Make sure to check:

The top or tip of your big toe

The base of all the smaller toes

Your heel

The outside edge of your foot

The ball of your foot

- Walking barefoot is discouraged. If you have no feeling your feet, you will not know if you step on glass or repeatedly walk on a sharp pebble trapped in a shoe all day.
- Orthotics may help if you are experiencing pressure-related foot issues such as corns or calluses. Orthotics help to support your feet, evening out your weight across the whole of your foot. Good orthotics custom made by a podiatrist or other foot specialist can also help alleviate flat foot, support high arches and take pressure off your heels.
- As with many foot issues, wearing appropriate shoes can go a long way to relieving symptoms. Look for shoes that are boxier in the toe area. If you are a woman, your days wearing pointy-toed shoes are gone. Shoes should also have a firm heel to counter pressure and give your heel a soft place to rest. If the ball of the foot is your most troublesome spot, a shoe with a rocker sole might be recommended by your podiatry doctor.
- You should wash your feet every day, being sure to use only mild soap and lukewarm water. If you are not able to feel anything due to nerve damage, you want to be extra careful with things like water temperature and how vigorously you dry your feet so you don't damage your skin. Simply pat dry, checking between your toes for moisture. Letting your feet soak is not advisable if you have a diabetic foot.
- Lotion is great for a diabetic foot because it can reduce the dry cracked skin that allows infections to get into your foot. Just put it on the outside of your foot, top to bottom, but not between your toes. More than likely, your foot specialist will have some good lotion samples at the office, so you can try several to find one that works well for you.

- Keep your toenails cut straight across and use a nail file to file down sharp corners. Do not give in to the temptation to work on an ingrown toenail. Instead, you should call your New York foot doctor to take care of it.
- Because you may not be able to feel pain, heat or cold, your podiatrist will likely recommend you stay away from things that could hurt you but that perhaps you wouldn't think twice about normally. The consequences of using things like antiseptic solutions, over the counter medications, or heating your feet with heating pads, propping them on a radiator or too close to a fire, can cause injury that you won't be able to feel.
- You should always aim to keep your feet warm and dry. Wear appropriate, water-proof shoes and socks if you must go out in the rain or snow. Loose socks at night should become part of your regular foot care routine.
- Smoking is bad for blood circulation, lowers the amount of oxygen in your blood and can cause your chance of having a non-healing wound that leads to an amputation much higher. If you currently smoke, a good podiatry doctor should be able to recommend a specialist who can assist you with quitting smoking.