



## Care of the Diabetic Foot

### **Diabetes: How it affects your feet**

Diabetes is a condition of elevated blood sugar that affects about 6 percent of the population or 16 million people. The elevated blood sugars affect the feet in multiple ways. Diabetes causes damage to blood vessels decreasing the blood flow to the feet. Diabetes also affects the nervous system damaging the nerves leading to neuropathy that leads to a loss of sensation in the feet. The chronic nerve damage also leads to a decrease in the moisture in the feet, leading to dry and cracked skin.

### **The risk to your feet**

The risk to your feet is large. Minor injuries can become severe emergencies in a matter of days. The consequences can be great, ranging from hospitalization for antibiotics to amputation of a toe or even the whole leg. The poor sensation and lack of blood flow to the foot allow a small wound or blister become a large problem in a very short time. Preventive care for your feet is critical in your overall health care and preventing amputation.

### **Care of your Diabetic Foot**

#### **Inspection**

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. Get someone to help you, or use a mirror. Feel each foot for swelling. Examine between your toes. Check six major locations on the bottom of each foot: the tip of the big toe, base of the little toes, base of the middle toes, heel, outside edge of the foot and across the ball of the foot. Check for sensation in each foot.

#### **Shoewear**

Choose and wear your shoes carefully. Buy new shoes late in the day when your feet are larger. 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.

**Never walk barefoot.** The neuropathy decreases the sensation so that little pebbles or objects that get stuck in the foot may not be noticed by a diabetic. This can lead to a massive infection that goes unnoticed. Always having a shoe on your foot decreases this risk.

### General Care of the Diabetic Foot

- Wash your feet every day with mild soap and warm water. Test the water temperature with your hand first. Don't soak your feet. When drying them, pat each foot with a towel and be careful between your toes.
- Use quality lotion to keep the skin of your feet soft and moist - but don't put any lotion between your toes.
- Trim your toe nails straight across. Avoid cutting the corners. Use a nail file or emery board. If you find an ingrown toenail, see your podiatrist. Good podiatric foot care is important in preventing infections.
- Don't use antiseptic solutions, drugstore medications, heating pads or sharp instruments on your feet. Don't put your feet on radiators or in front of the fireplace.
- Always keep your feet warm. Wear loose socks to bed. Don't get your feet wet in snow or rain. Wear warm socks and shoes in winter.
- Don't smoke or sit cross-legged. Both decrease blood supply to your feet.

### Deformities in the Foot

When your feet lose their feeling, 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. You should seek urgent medical attention if either of these occur.