

Foot & Ankle Center of Illinois Diabetics at Higher Risk for Foot Problems



Article by:

John M. Sigle, DPM, FACFAS

National Diabetes Awareness Month is celebrated in November each year. This is a time to raise awareness about diabetes, a chronic condition that affects millions of Americans. According to the **American Podiatric Medical Association**, (APMA) over thirty million Americans have diabetes and around seven million are not aware that they have the disease.

The Foot & Ankle Center of Illinois will be releasing information on diabetic foot care and encourage diabetics to take preventative measures to avoid nerve damage and poor circulation. Foot problems are the most common reason diabetics are admitted to the hospital.

Diabetes damages the blood vessels and leads to poor blood flow to the lower extremities. As the blood vessels narrow and harden, it makes it more difficult to fight infection and heal. Poor circulation decreases sensation making it difficult to gauge temperatures. Walking can cause intermittent claudication (pain in calve muscle). The combination of peripheral neuropathy and vascular disease cause major problems. Unhealed sores can turn into gangrene and amputation.

Here are some of the more common conditions for concern, a new innovation for wound care, and helpful tips for prevention:

Common Conditions for Concern

Foot Ulcers

An ulcer usually appears on the bottom of the feet. Treatment depends on the nature of the ulcer. X-rays can determine if bone is infected. The site can be cleaned by removing dead tissue and antibiotics may be administered. Treatment by a vascular surgeon may be necessary if an ulcer is due to poor circulation. One of the

biggest ways to treat a foot ulcer is to find ways to take the load off the ulceration and perform weekly debridement's. Cutting edge skin grafts made out of amnion are often used to stimulate healing, sometimes months faster than traditional care. Special therapeutic shoes are usually prescribed to prevent ulcers.

Skin Changes

The nerves that control moisture and oil production in the foot are flawed. Consequently, skin becomes dry and prone to crack and peel.

Calluses

Diabetics are prone to calluses because there are high-pressure areas under the foot. Often, they turn into open sores if they are not properly treated in a timely fashion. Improper removal of calluses and corns with chemical agents or unsterile tools may lead to serious consequences. Skin moisturizers need to be carefully applied to avoid

Toenail Fungus

Toenail fungus may lead to further infection and complications for diabetics if left unchecked. It may also lead to complications if it is in conjunction with an ingrown toenail. There are a wide range of conventional treatments and medications available with varying success rates. The Cutera Genesis Plus® Laser that we use at our clinic effectively eradicates toenail fungus in seventy to eighty percent of the time.

Foot Deformities

Foot deformities such as hammertoes, claw toes, and bunions may increase the risk of calluses, corns, blisters, ulcers, and infections. Increased friction from shoes may cause problems. Therapeutic shoes are prescribed to accommodate changes in foot shape. In some cases, operative treatment is necessary.

Amputation

Diabetics have a much higher

chance of having their foot or leg amputated than non-diabetics because peripheral arterial disease (PAD) restricts blood flow. About 71,000 lower-limb amputations were performed in 2023. We are able to perform simple in-office testing Ankle-Brachia Index (ABI) blood flow checks in the lower extremities to assess and diagnose conditions properly. If necessary, we can follow these types of studies with in depth computerized topography and other CT scans.

New Innovation for Wound Care

UltraMist®System

Podiatric technology continues to advance every day. We are now using the new innovation in wound care called the UltraMist®System. We see a lot of wounds in our clinic with our diabetic patients, postoperative patients, and even patients with ingrown toenails with conditions that can take a long time to heal. One of the biggest things that we see causing a delay in healing is a high presence of bacteria. When bacteria gets into your wound it causes a biofilm. Biofilm slows down the production of capillaries and healing. The UltraMist®System allows us to debride the wound and kill the bacteria without causing pain to the patient: and it stimulates the body to heal. This new technology allows wounds to heal faster. Many of the recent innovations in wound care and post operative care are bringing new hope to diabetics.

Tips for Prevention

Self-Prevention

Most of us pay little attention to our feet compared to other parts of our body. This is a problem, especially if you have diabetes. Regular inspection of your feet is essential on a daily basis. It won't cost you a nickel and it is one of the best ways to prevent foot complications. There are many other things you can do to care for your feet. Here are some tips:

- Wash your feet daily
- Keep circulation flowing in your feet when inactive
- Be active and exercise regularly
- Always protect your feet by wearing socks and shoes
- Protect your feet from extreme temperatures
- Moisturize your skin regularly
- Trim your nails carefully
- Wear comfortable shoes that fit properly.
- Prescription shoes are a safe and effective way to minimize your risk of chronic problems.

Annual Examinations

Annual foot examination by your podiatrist is essential for any non-wound person with diabetes. Frequent visits may be required for the treatment of open wounds or more chronic conditions.

Medicare's Therapeutic Shoe Program for Diabetics.

Ask your podiatrist about this fantastic program. Without a doubt, it is one of Medicare's successes. The program provides one pair of diabetic shoes and three pair of special sole inserts every year for free. The shoes and inserts will help prevent a callus and ulcer from developing. Eligibility requirements require a medical confirmation that you have a foot ulcer, nerve function problem, reduced blood flow, previous amputation, or foot deformity such as a hammertoe, claw toe, or bunion.

Visit myfootandankecenter.com if you are interested to learn more about wound care advancements for chronic ulcers and new technologies for wound care treatments. The Foot & Ankle Center of Illinois clinics are located in Springfield, Decatur, Shelbyville, and Carlinville. Call 217-787-2700 for an appointment or book on-line.

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