

## Podiatrists should be part of diabetics' healthcare team

By Ujjwal Datta, DPM, AACFAS

**D**iabetics can develop many different foot problems and even ordinary problems can get worse and lead to serious complications. But most can avoid serious issues by having their feet checked by a podiatrist annually and following some simple tips. Most importantly diabetics should work with their physician to manage their blood glucose levels, check their feet every day for red spots, cuts, swelling and blisters, and seek medical attention if injuries are found.

Foot problems most often happen when there is nerve damage called diabetic neuropathy. Although it can cause pain, neuropathy can also lessen the ability to feel pain, heat and cold. This

*(Continued on next page)*

## HEALTH & FITNESS

*(Continued from previous page)*

can lead to injuries going unnoticed. Diabetics also may have skin and skin structure problems in their feet such as dry, cracked skin, corns and calluses, eczema and fungal infections because their nerves no longer control oil and moisture. They also may suffer from poor blood circulation, leading to abnormal healing and in the most severe cases, gangrene.

Guarding against infection is essential for diabetics. High blood glucose levels make it harder for the body to fight infection. Calluses, if not trimmed by a podiatrist, can become ulcers (open wounds) which in turn can get infected and cause osteomyelitis (bone infection) which may lead to amputation. Luckily, there are many things that can be done to keep feet healthy, including;

- Wash feet every day. Dry them carefully, especially between the toes.
- Keep your skin soft and smooth. Rub a thin coat of skin lotion over the tops and bottoms of feet, but not between toes.
- If toenails can be seen and reached, trim them when needed. Trim toenails straight across and file the edges with

an emery board.

- Wear shoes and socks at all times. Never walk barefoot. Wear comfortable shoes that fit well and protect the feet. Check inside shoes before wearing them.
- Protect feet from hot and cold. Wear shoes at the beach and during any outdoor activities. Test water temperature before bathing.
- Keep blood flowing to feet. Wiggle toes and move ankles up and down for five minutes, two or three times a day.
- Eat right and exercise.

Following these simple tips can help diabetics avoid prolonged foot problems. Remember, healthy feet make happy feet and happy feet mean happy people.

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