

Diabetic Complications and Amputation Prevention

People with diabetes are prone to having foot problems, often because of two complications of diabetes: nerve damage (neuropathy) and poor circulation. Neuropathy causes loss of feeling in your feet, taking away your ability to feel pain and discomfort, so you may not detect an injury or irritation. Poor circulation in your feet reduces your ability to heal, making it hard for even a tiny cut to resist infection.

Having diabetes increases the risk of developing a wide range of foot problems. Furthermore, with diabetes, small foot problems can turn into serious complications.

Diabetes-related Foot and Leg Problems

- **Infections and ulcers (sores) that don't heal.** An ulcer is a sore in the skin that may go all the way to the bone. Because of poor circulation and neuropathy in the feet, cuts or blisters can easily turn into ulcers that become infected and won't heal. This is a common – and serious – complication of diabetes and can lead to a loss of your foot, your leg, or your life.
- **Corns and calluses.** When neuropathy is present, you can't tell if your shoes are causing pressure and producing corns or calluses. Corns and calluses must be properly treated or they can develop into ulcers.
- **Dry, cracked skin.** Poor circulation and neuropathy can make your skin dry. This may seem harmless, but dry skin can result in cracks that may become sores and can lead to infection.
- **Nail disorders.** Ingrown toenails (which curve into the skin on the sides of the nail) and fungal infections can go unnoticed because of loss of feeling. If they are not properly treated, they can lead to infection.
- **Hammertoes and bunions.** Nerve damage affecting muscles can cause muscle weakness and loss of tone in the feet, resulting in hammertoes and bunions. If left untreated, these deformities can cause ulcers.
- **Charcot foot.** This is a complex foot deformity. It develops as a result of loss of sensation and an undetected broken bone that leads to destruction of the soft tissue of the foot. Because of neuropathy, the pain of the fracture goes unnoticed and the patient continues to walk on the broken bone, making it worse. This disabling complication is so severe that surgery, and occasionally amputation, may become necessary.
- **Poor blood flow.** In diabetes, the blood vessels below the knee often become narrow and restrict blood flow. This prevents wounds from healing and may cause tissue death.

What Your Foot and Ankle Surgeon Can Do

Your foot and ankle surgeon can help wounds heal, preventing amputation. There are many new surgical techniques available to save feet and legs, including joint reconstruction and wound healing technologies. Getting regular foot checkups and seeking immediate help when you notice something can keep small problems from worsening. Your foot and ankle surgeon works together with other health care providers to prevent and treat complications from diabetes.

Call to schedule your appointment today.

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