



Diabetic Foot Ulcer

Overview

Diabetes is the leading cause of non-traumatic lower extremity amputations in the United States. Patients with diabetes are at greater risk of complications, such as diabetic neuropathy and peripheral vascular diseases, which can ultimately lead to a foot ulcer. A foot ulcer is a very serious complication. In fact, 85% of patients who lost a limb, had a foot ulcer first.

Approximately 25-30% of patients with diabetes develop a foot sore, or ulcer. Though diabetic ulcers can be anywhere on the foot, most occur on the ball of the foot or on the bottom of the toes. Once you develop an ulcer, it may take weeks or even months for it to heal.

Early intervention and proper treatment can help prevent complications and reduce your risk of amputation by as much as 82%.

The most important thing you can do to lower your risk of developing a foot ulcer is to manage your diabetes.

Causes

Diabetic foot problems are related to poor circulation. Poor circulation causes a decrease in blood supply to the nerves, which results in nerve damage called neuropathy. As a result, you may have decreased or absent sensation in your feet and a diminished ability to:

- Feel pain and pressure
- Detect hot and cold sensation
- Maintain your balance

Other factors that contribute to the risk of developing foot problems include:

- Elevated blood sugars
- Obesity
- Alcoholism
- Hypothyroidism
- Hypertension
- Smoking

Treatment and Care

After a thorough evaluation, which may include diagnostic testing, your provider will discuss a treatment plan with you. Treatments for a diabetic foot ulcer will vary based on individuals, but may include:

- Improving blood glucose management
- Special dressings to absorb drainage
- Prevention and treatment of infection
- Appropriate off-loading device (i.e., a special shoe, cast, wheelchair, etc.)

Until your foot ulcer is healed, your activity will be limited. Walking on an ulcer can cause it to worsen.

Your provider will also encourage you to eat healthy. Foods high in protein, vitamins and minerals are important to healing and maintaining healthy skin.

Tips for Caring for Your Feet

Diabetic ulcers are often painless, so special care must be given to taking care of your feet.

- **Check your feet daily.** Look for blisters, cuts and scratches. Use a long-handled mirror or place a mirror on the floor to see the bottom of your feet. Always check between your toes.
- **Keep your feet clean.** Wash daily, dry carefully – especially between the toes.
- **Moisturize your feet.** Apply a moisturizer as recommended by your provider, but never apply between toes as that can lead to a fungal infection.
- **Do not walk barefoot.** That includes on sandy beaches and pool/patio areas.
- **Wear properly fitted shoes.** Shoes should be comfortable when purchased. Do not wear narrow, pointed toe or high-heeled shoes.
- **Inspect the inside of your shoes daily.** Check for foreign objects, tears or rough areas on the inside of the shoe.
- **Do not wear shoes without socks or stockings.** Wear clean, properly fitted socks. Cotton or cotton-blend socks are recommended.
- **Avoid temperature extremes.** Test water temperature with your hand or elbow prior to bathing. Do not soak your feet in hot water or apply a hot water bottle. If your feet feel cold at night, wear socks.
- **Trim your toenails regularly.** Always cut your nails straight across.
- **Do not use over-the-counter remedies for corns.** See a podiatrist to have these evaluated.
- **Avoid crossing your legs.** This causes pressure on the nerves and blood vessels, resulting in less blood flow to your feet.

Signs and Symptoms

You may be at risk for a foot ulcer if you have one or more of the following signs:

- Lack of sensation (feeling) in your feet
- Feeling of “pins and needles” in your feet
- Feet that hurt while walking or resting
- Stains on socks or shoes
- Sores that do not heal
- Skin on your feet becomes thick, dry or scaly
- Calluses on the feet or toes

Important

If you notice any of the following symptoms, notify your provider immediately:

- You have a fever of 101 degrees or higher
- You have an increase in leg/foot pain
- A discolored drainage is noted from the ulcer or a bad odor is noted from the ulcer site
- Increased swelling of your foot/leg
- Feet or leg becomes cold, pale, blue or existing numbness increases

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL:
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