

# The Diabetic Foot

Dr. Katz is a member of the American Diabetes Association and would be happy to evaluate you.

Five percent of the United States population suffers with diabetes mellitus. Once diagnosed, treatment consists of either dietary control, oral medication, insulin or a combination of these therapies. The effects of diabetes on the lower extremities, and the feet specifically, present a great challenge to the podiatrist.

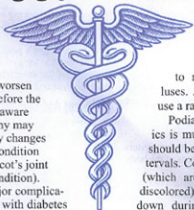
Perhaps the most common consequence of diabetes to the foot is neuropathy. Neuropathy means functional disturbances or pathological changes in the peripheral nervous system. Neuropathy may cause unpleasant burning or tingling sensations, or may render the foot incapable of feeling any sensations.

At least 35% of all diabetics will develop neuropathy. Neuropathy is not related to severity of the diabetes. Pain from improper fitting shoes and bony pressure go unnoticed and ulcerations (breaks in the skin due to unremitting pressure) frequently result.

Diabetics have a decreased

resistance to infection. When this is coupled with neuropathy an infection may worsen considerably before the patient is even aware of it. Neuropathy may also cause bony changes resulting in a condition known as Charcot's joint (an arthritic condition).

Another major complication associated with diabetes is impairment of circulation. Many diabetics have decreased circulation in their feet. This causes the feet to feel cooler than normal. Because of poor circulation, many diabetics have problems healing from minor cuts or abrasions on the feet. The tendency is greater for diabetics to get infections and they usually take longer to heal. This is why diabetics should never try treating their



own feet. They should avoid all over-the-counter products which claim to remove corns and calluses. Also they should never use a razor blade on their feet.

Podiatric treatment of diabetes is multifaceted. The diabetic should be examined at regular intervals. Corns, calluses, and nails (which are frequently thick and discolored) should be cut or pared down during these examinations. Pressure from bony prominences are usually treated with molded shoes or orthotics (a special type of shoe inlay). In certain cases surgery may be necessary.

Diabetes is a disease with numerous medical and podiatric problems. While there is no cure, treatment is available and should be sought to prevent long-term consequences of this disease.

## Treat Your Feet

We cramp them into too-tight shoes, smother them in "unbreathing" nylon fabric, subject them to pressure from our body weight merely by standing on them, and pound them against hard surfaces when we walk or run. No wonder our feet often develop painful and unattractive problems!

**Hammertoe** - Frequently due to inherited foot structures, this is a contraction of the toe caused by tightening of the ligaments that connect one bone to another, forcing the toe bones to assume an abnormal position. Often, as a result, shoes apply pressure to the deformed toes causing a hard corn to form.

**Heel Pain** - Bearing all of the body's weight with every step, the heel is subject to considerable stress. Weight gain, high impact athletic activities, or prolonged walking or standing increase such stress. The pain is most often a result of heel spur (extra bone that grows on the bottom of the heel bone).

**Ingrown Toenail** - This problem most frequently affects the great toe and

## Remember When Walking Was A Pleasure?

may be due to improper cutting, short or narrow shoes, and even trauma to the affected toenail. The nail plate may curve, causing the edge to press and cut into the tissue. If the skin is broken, bacteria may enter and cause a painful infection.

**Plantar Warts** - Often mistaken for corns or calluses, these warts are caused by a virus and appear on the sole of the foot. They have a spongy appearance with little black, brown or red spots that are actually blood vessels feeding them. A light ring appears around each growth, separating it from surrounding skin.

**Fungus Nails** - Fungus, like many skin conditions, can spread to the nails. The fungus nail my lift away from its bed or may develop snow white or brown streaks or become thickened. Laboratory cultures can determine if fungus is indeed present.

**Thick Toenails** - Injury from stubbing the toes or dropping something heavy on it may result in a rather unsightly thickened nail. Sometimes the nail root is permanently altered or the nail bed is

damaged, preventing a normal nail plate from developing.

**Athlete's Foot** - You don't have to be an athlete to develop this fungal infection, though the organisms which attack the prime areas between the toes are easily picked up in a locker room or anywhere people walk around barefooted.

**Arthritis** - Changes around two or more bones that meet cause inflammation of the joint. Rheumatoid arthritis can be a crippling, deforming type of joint disease and requires aid in maintaining the best possible pain free walking surface. Osteoarthritis or "wear and tear" on foot joints can usually be treated successfully with a variety of methods.

**Go the extra mile** - Seek professional attention for foot problems.

Trusting your own "bathroom surgery" or "father time" to correct these problems can produce disastrous results. Left untreated or improperly treated, many common foot ailments can cause enormous pain or discomfort and may even result in unnecessary permanent damage.