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FOOT CARE FOR PATIENTS WITH DIABETES

It is a fact that diabetics are more susceptible than nondiabetics to infection. A reason for this is that the white blood cells, which fight infection, do not perform effectively when blood sugar levels are higher than normal. Consequently, when bacteria and fungi invade tissues, the body's defenses may be unable to prevent the development of cellulitis (infection of the skin), abscesses (infection of soft tissue beneath the skin), or osteomyelitis (bone infection).

Additionally, nerve damage, particularly in the lower extremities, is a frequent complication of diabetes. When nerves in the foot are compromised, a decrease in sensation can result. This loss in sensation makes it difficult for the diabetic to distinguish between hot and cold, or to realize when the foot has been cut or bruised. Once the skin has been broken as the result of an injury, friction, or burn, infection can set in. Foot infections in diabetics can progress into major problems if treatment is not sought promptly. Foot ulcers, gangrene, and even amputation occur in diabetics as complications of foot infections.

By following some simple recommendations on foot care, you can minimize the threat of infections. Here is a checklist of Do's and Don'ts for diabetics regarding foot care.

Do's for Diabetics

- Inspect feet daily for cuts, blisters, and scratches.
- Wash feet daily; always dry carefully between the toes.
- Powder feet and shoes after bathing.
- Keep feet warm and dry.
- Cut toenails straight across.
- Ask the physician, podiatrist, or pharmacist to recommend a mild lubricant to protect from drying and cracking.
- Wear loose-fitting socks to bed if feet are cold; never use hot packs or hot water bottles.
- Wear comfortable, well-fitting shoes.
- Carefully break in new shoes to avoid blisters.
- Inspect the inside of shoes for foreign objects and torn linings.

Don'ts for Diabetics

- Don't walk barefoot, even indoors!
- Don't smoke. Smoking reduces blood circulation; in diabetics this can lead to the loss of a limb.
- Don't cut corns or calluses yourself.
- Don't use caustic chemical agents or any other irritants for the removal of corns and calluses.
- Avoid open-toed shoes, particularly sandals with thongs between the toes.

When to Contact the Doctor

Have your feet examined regularly; and between visits, contact your doctor IMMEDIATELY if any of the following occur:

- Ingrown toenail.
- Cut, sore, or discoloration that shows no sign of healing.
- Pain in the feet or calves.

Remember to inform every doctor you visit that you are a diabetic!