

Health Hints

Put Your Best Foot Forward For Your Diabetes

(NAPS)—More than 26 million people in the U.S. have diabetes, and as many as one in three adult Americans could have diabetes by 2050. That's important because over time, diabetes can lead to serious problems throughout your body, including your eyes, kidneys and nerves. Because of the potential for nerve damage, people with diabetes are more likely to have foot problems and are at higher risk of developing diabetic foot ulcers (DFUs).

What's a DFU?

DFUs are chronic sores that develop on the foot or lower extremities of people with diabetes. Small sores or breaks in the skin may turn into deep skin ulcers if not treated properly. If these skin ulcers do not improve or become larger or extend deeper, amputation of the affected limb may be needed.

Among people with diabetes, 15 to 25 percent will experience a DFU in their lifetime and of those, 14 to 24 percent will result in an amputation. In the U.S., 60 percent of all lower extremity amputations occur among persons with diabetes and nearly 85 percent of these amputations are preceded by a foot ulcer.

DFU Risk Factors

The greatest risk factor for DFUs is nerve damage, often referred to as neuropathy. Other factors that increase the risk of developing a DFU include:

- **Age:** Risk increases with age.
- **Gender:** Males are at higher risk.
- **Race:** African Americans, Hispanic Americans and Native Americans are at higher risk.



A healthy lifestyle can be a step in the right direction for people in danger of developing diabetic foot ulcers.

- **Duration of diabetes:** The longer you have diabetes, the greater your risk for developing a DFU.

DFU Prevention

Living a healthy lifestyle can help reduce the risk of developing DFUs. Several risk factors, such as blood glucose levels and smoking, can be controlled or treated with your healthcare provider's help.

DFUs often begin as minor sores or cuts that get worse

because of low blood flow or infection. Regular foot examinations can help diagnose any problems early and minimize the risk of developing a DFU. If you have diabetes, it is important to watch for any changes or injuries to your feet that you might not feel, including cuts, scrapes, calluses, blisters, redness, swelling and toenail infections.

There are some important steps you can take to help prevent a DFU, including taking care of your diabetes and following the “3-Ws” foot plan:

- Wash your feet daily in warm water—always dry them well and keep your feet moisturized by using lotion, cream or petroleum jelly on the tops and bottoms.

- Wear socks and shoes that are breathable, provide cushioning and fit well. Always take care to protect your feet and avoid blisters.

- Wiggle your toes and ankles several times a day to improve blood flow. Put your feet up while sitting and do not wear constrictive items around your feet.

DFU Treatment

If you have diabetes, any sore on your foot is a serious problem and should be treated by a wound care specialist immediately. A wound care specialist is a doctor or nurse who specializes in treating DFUs and will have access to advanced treatment options that a primary care physician may not have access to.

To find a wound care specialist nearby or learn more about preventing DFUs, visit www.heal2gether.org.