

See The Podiatrist



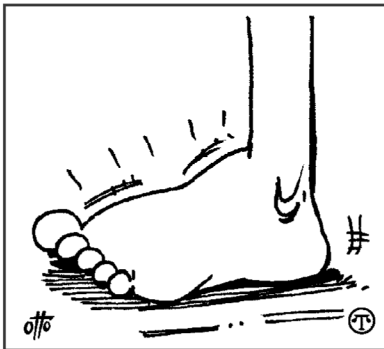
Getting a Foothold on Diabetes

(NAPSA)—For a diabetic, good foot care is essential to staying healthy. A diabetic foot is particularly susceptible to infections that can be difficult to treat. Consequently, it is important for diabetics to see a podiatrist regularly. A podiatrist is a medical professional trained to treat medical/surgical foot disorders ranging from ingrown toenails to infections, trauma and deformities. Podiatrists can identify lower extremity problem areas early and begin treatment.

Diabetic foot problems are a result of the changes diabetes causes in the skin. Diabetic skin becomes thick, rigid and cracks easily, resulting in fissures that are entryways for bacterial and fungal infections. Moisturization is essential for diabetic feet so the skin remains an unbroken barrier against these microorganisms. Your podiatrist can perform a thorough exam to ensure that your feet are smooth and have no openings for infection.

Preventing infection is serious because the immune system of a diabetic does not operate as well as that of a healthy individual. Therefore, diabetics get more infections and have a harder time healing than people without diabetes. Athlete's foot and other fungal infections of the feet and lower legs are serious challenges for these patients. Podiatrists can energetically treat infections early, before they become dangerous.

Diabetic skin causes another problem for patients. The rigid skin makes it more difficult to bend the ankle, which puts addi-



If left untreated, foot problems can become serious—and extremely uncomfortable.

tional pressure on the sole of the foot when a person walks. Added pressure leads to lesions that eventually become ulcers, particularly on skin beneath the big toe. Often, diabetic patients do not even know an ulcer has started, because nerve damage has decreased the feeling in their feet. An undetected ulcer easily becomes infected. If an infection has settled in a wound on the foot or lower leg of a diabetic, it can spread and lead to serious, even life-threatening infections. A podiatrist can identify the early warning signs of an ulcer or treat a problem wound effectively, before amputation is the only option.

Diabetics should pay particular attention to the appearance and health of their feet. Many problems with diabetic feet begin with thick, dry, rigid skin. By using a proper foot moisturizer and making regular visits to a podiatrist, many patients can prevent serious foot problems and continue to lead an active, healthy life.