

# METRO FOOT AND ANKLE

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## DIABETES AND FOOT AND ANKLE CARE

As you may know, Diabetes is a serious metabolic disease process that affects the entire body simultaneously. Over 8.1% of today's population and 23+ million people nationally suffer from this disease. Diabetes has become the 5<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in the United States. Therefore, much research is being conducted, and all physicians strongly recommend you take their advice and limit potential complications.

Early identification and prevention is advocated to all affected. Dr. Saunders refers patients to their family physician and [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org) for further education. It's often recommended families attend diabetic workshops and nutritional classes.

**Foot disease is the most common complication** of diabetes leading to hospitalization. In diabetics, there is potential to have many foot and ankle problems. Diabetes affects the entire body, and several factors can combine to create big problems. The most important way to prevent complications is to control your blood glucose (sugar) levels. With elevation of the glucose level, the potential side effects occur.

**What causes Foot Problems?** There is a triad of conditions that seem to cascade to large problems among diabetics. The daily wear and tear and trauma on the body from walking adds stress, leading to complications.

- Neuropathy      Loss of feeling in the feet and hands
- Vasculopathy    Poor circulation
- Immunopathy    Prone to infection

**Neuropathy** is a vast topic, but is caused from a disturbance in the body's nervous system, so that one has diminished sensation. Your ability to feel things against your foot is gone, the tightness of shoes diminished, and discrimination of heat removed. All of your protective mechanisms against local danger are altered with neuropathy, and recognition of injury becomes a challenge. If local aggravating factors are left unchecked, then a large potential problem can occur. Sometimes neuropathy becomes quite painful and keeps you up at night with burning, shooting pains.

**Poor circulation** can slow the healing process for any trauma/wound that occurs. There are many small areas of atherosclerosis to the leg/foot and toes that lead to decreased circulation, and reduced blood flow to the feet. If there is decreased circulation, the body cannot deliver oxygen and nutrients to the feet to help heal. Serious vascular compromise can lead to gangrene and ultimately amputation.

**Infection** is a common problem among diabetics. As a Diabetic, your immune system is compromised and prone to even the common cold. There is an apparent deficiency that occurs within the white blood cell, and the body has trouble fighting off bacteria. This bacterium enters the skin from a cut, or foot ulcer. Deep infection usually requires surgery; therefore proper and immediate attention is mandatory. Infections often cause damage to the skin and deep tissues and needs to be eradicated ASAP.

**Skin changes and ulcer.** Diabetes can cause changes to the skin and surrounding structures. The skin can become very dry and crack. This can become an area for infection to occur. The skin is more prone to sores or ulcers. An ulceration is an open wound that generally occurs from pressure underneath your foot. Fifteen percent of all diabetics will experience an ulcer. There may be callus on the bottom of your foot as a response to abnormal pressure. This is a warning from the body, and if it continues can lead to a wound. Ulcers are notorious for being difficult to heal because of continuous “micro-trauma” or pressure. Greater than 60% of non-traumatic AMPUTATIONS occur in diabetic patients. The rate of an amputation is 10X higher among diabetics.

#### **Vicious Cycle:**

A common event can occur among diabetics involving all three of the above concerns.

- Neuropathy (loss of feeling)
- Callus / pre-ulcer / trauma
- Immunocompromised with infections
- Wound / ulcer with lack of circulation

**PREVENTION:** Don't neglect your feet!!! They need to carry you for many years. **Quit smoking.** Smoking aggravates everything and predisposes you to vascular disease.

- DON'T walk barefoot - EVER. Not even indoors
- Don't cut corns or calluses yourself... Never use OTC corn remover pads!
- DON'T soak your feet. This will actually dry them out more
- DON'T ever use electric blankets or warmers; use socks
- Don't delay!!!

**DO:** Check your feet daily (use a mirror if necessary), monitor for redness, blisters, lesions, or sores. If anything abnormal is noted, call Metro Foot & Ankle **immediately** for an evaluation.

- Wash your feet daily and dry in between your toes
- Wear appropriate shoes. Comfort is a good indicator
- DO learn as much as you can about diabetes
- Keep your glucose level under control and follow up with your family doctor
- CALL immediately if you notice any cuts, cracks, wounds, swelling, redness -- early intervention and prevention is the best treatment
- EXERCISE DAILY