

# Midwest Podiatry<sup>TM</sup> Centers



## **Diabetic Foot Care: Fighting for the Future of Your Feet**

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## Who Needs This Guide?

If you have been diagnosed with diabetes – regardless of whether that diagnosis was made years ago or just today – then diabetic foot care is something you need to consider and plan for now. There is no sooner time to begin!

We have seen, advised, and treated patients with diabetic foot concerns at every stage, and the best outcomes always arise from those who took their diabetes management and foot care seriously early on.

## “But My Feet Feel Fine!”

Perhaps this guide was sent or recommended to you, and you’re uncertain why. You might be living with diabetes, but you have never really had any problems with your feet. So what is there really to do?

If your feet really do feel perfectly fine right now, we couldn’t be happier to hear that. It’s what we want to hear from all our patients, after all!

But the unfortunate truth is that, with diabetes, there is a high chance your feet may not stay fine in the future. And by taking steps now to properly care for your feet, you can help yourself mitigate or even eliminate your risks of future complications.

To better understand what is at stake and what you can do about it, it is important to look at just what diabetes is capable of doing to someone’s foot health and mobility over time.

# Why Diabetes is Dangerous to Your Feet

Diabetes can have negative effects throughout the body, and its consequences certainly shouldn't be ignored in those places either. However, the feet are in a uniquely vulnerable situation that has the potential to turn catastrophic without proper attention.

One of the most significant dangers of diabetes is how gradually these complications can occur. Problems can develop so slowly that it's possible to not even be aware of their presence until more damage has occurred than needed to happen.

There are two big ways that the effects of diabetes can endanger the feet.

## It Attacks Your Circulation

Over time, high blood glucose levels can cause damage to our blood vessels. That damage allows a better opportunity for plaque to develop on the walls of these vessels, gradually restricting the flow of blood throughout the body. This type of condition is often referred to as peripheral artery disease, or PAD.

When it comes to matters of circulation, the feet are in a particularly vulnerable position due to how far they are located from the main pump of the heart. It is already more of a natural challenge to get great blood flow to the feet than it is other areas of the body due to distance alone. Because of this, when anything begins to interfere with circulation in the body, the feet tend to experience the ill effects of it first.

Our blood delivers oxygen, nutrients, growth factors, and other materials cells need to perform their functions properly. When blood flow is impeded, it's a lot like a business not receiving all the deliveries it needs on time. Operations start to suffer.

For the feet, this can mean that injuries take more time to heal. In more severe circumstances, healing might not fully occur at all without medical intervention.

Additionally, other functions of the feet can begin to decrease in strength and effectiveness.

## It Attacks Your Nerve Function

Nerves are very sensitive instruments. PAD and other complications of diabetes can easily damage and stifle their function over time.

When nerves in the feet start to become damaged (also known as peripheral neuropathy), the first symptoms tend to be pain, tingling, and other abnormal sensations. With enough damage, however, the nerves stop transmitting sensations at all, leading the feet to become largely numb to pain, heat, and touch.

According to the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA), 60-70% of diabetes patients have some form of nervous system damage to their feet, ranging from mild pain to severe impairment of sensation.



## Leaving Your Feet Defenseless

Taken separately, the two complications mentioned above are already bad. Put them together, though, and they can be a recipe for disaster.

Our feet are on the front lines for a lot of action, and as a consequence can take a fair amount of injury. Stepping on objects, bumping into table legs, and even friction-based sores from rubbing against the insides of shoes can all happen.

But if your nerves are not functioning properly, you may not feel these injuries develop. And if your circulation is impeded, it can take longer for these problems to heal (if at all).

You might be seeing where the major concerns lie now. Not noticing sores or injuries to treat them provides a greater opportunity for them to become worse – especially if you are directly walking on them or the source of irritation keeps working at them. What was once a small nick or sore spot can develop into an ulcer with a higher likelihood of infection – and that can turn into an even worse situation.

In some severe cases, the very structure of the foot can begin to break down due to damage; a condition known as Charcot foot.

We understand that, especially for most people in the early stages of diabetes, the possibilities above may sound extreme; like there is no way that could ever happen in your case. But please believe us when we say the possibility is considerable.

According to the APMA, up to a quarter of patients with diabetes will develop a foot ulcer, and about two-thirds of all the lower limb amputations that occur in the United States are the result of diabetes.

The good news is that, by making some simple efforts now, you can greatly reduce the risk of your foot health ever reaching such a dire point.

# What You Can Do to Protect Your Feet

It is not difficult to take personal steps toward diabetic foot care. In fact, many of the most impactful actions you can take require nothing more than a bit of due diligence and common sense!

Here are a few important things you can do, starting with arguably the most important:

## Conduct a Daily Diabetic Foot Inspection

Develop a habit of checking your feet every day for signs of trouble, and it can benefit greatly through the future!

It may help you best to choose a consistent, convenient time each day to do this. Before or after a shower, or just before bed can be good choices, as your feet will be bare then, anyway.

You only need a few minutes to look and feel over your feet for signs of anything abnormal. Look for:

- Cuts
- Sores
- Discoloration
- Ingrown toenails
- Warts
- Corns or calluses
- Blisters



In short, anything that just shouldn't be there. If you do find something and it seems mild, keep an eye on it for the next couple days to see if it improves. If it does not improve, gets worse, or already looks like a significant concern when you first find it, call us right away! We can advise you on the next steps you should take or recommend that you come in for an appointment if we need a closer look.

If you need help seeing all of your feet, a mirror or selfie stick can help you with more difficult angles. Enlisting a loved one to help you may also be an option.

Even if your feet seem perfectly healthy now, developing a habit of daily foot inspections will serve you well should your feet start to run into trouble. You will be an expert on what your feet should look and feel like, and more capable of identifying whether something is a concern!



# Choose Your Footwear Wisely

Good pairs of socks and shoes will protect your feet from the external elements, but they should not be causing any internal stress or aggravation to your feet in the process.

Ideal shoes fit well and provide full, proper support to your feet. Try to avoid wearing shoes that tend to force your weight to shift toward specific areas of the feet, such as high heels that focus pressure against the front of the foot and toes. These can easily create “hot spots” of stress and pressure where sores and injuries can form.

Also be mindful of the composition of your shoes and socks. Are there spots where they are rubbing intently against your skin? Certain types of seams can especially cause trouble to diabetic feet, and special models of shoes and socks are made seamlessly with this fact in mind.

It can also be very helpful to switch between shoes during the day. That way, any potential pressure points or “hot spots” a certain shoe may have will not be grinding against your foot all day.

If you have questions about the best footwear for your feet, never be afraid to let us know. We'll be happy to help you find the best types for your needs.



## Be Mindful of Your Environment

You should of course watch where you step, but also take measures to reduce the risks of injury where you are most frequently putting your feet.

What types of measures do we mean?

- Clear up clutter in walkways.
- Secure loose rugs.
- Make sure electrical cords and other tripping hazards are safely fastened down away from foot traffic.
- If you have decreased sensation in your feet, make sure bathwater and any other potentially hot surfaces are safe before going feet first into or onto them.

You should also always wear shoes outside. You never know what might be lurking in grass or sand. In some cases, we might also recommend that some patients leave their shoes on indoors as well.



## Focus on Healthy Circulation

The more support you can provide your feet in regard to circulation, the better! Help keep the blood flowing by:

- Exercising regularly.
- Putting a stop to smoking, if you currently do.
- Putting your feet up while you are sitting.
- Not wearing tight socks or stockings that may constrict blood flow to your feet
- Taking some time every few minutes throughout the day to wiggle your toes, and at least a few minutes every hour to get up and move around.

## Manage Your Diabetes Well

This should go without saying, but making the effort to keep your blood sugar levels under control and promptly address any problems related to your condition will serve your whole body well in the future; not just your feet.

If you do not yet have a doctor to go to for general diabetic care and needs, we highly recommend finding one. We will gladly work together with them, as well as any other member of your diabetic care team, to make sure you are receiving all the preventative attention and treatment you need.





# What We Can Do to Protect Your Feet

Having a foot care specialist you can turn to for diabetic care is an invaluable asset toward paving the way for a lower risk future. We can lend our expertise in many ways to keep your health, comfort, and mobility strong in the years ahead.

## Regular Check-Ups, Testing, & Preventative Care

While you are the primary guardian over your own foot health – especially if you are performing daily foot inspections – we can help you detect potential problems you might not be able to initially notice or know to be on the lookout for.

We often recommend a diabetic foot care check-up twice per year, but the frequency may be higher or lower based on your present condition. During these checkups, we can review how your feet may be changing over time regarding general health, comfort, nerve function, and other factors.

Having a running record will help us more easily identify any developing problems than we could if we were only seeing you for the first time. Just like performing daily foot inspections, we can learn what should be expected and what should not.

The earlier we identify a potential problem, the sooner we can address it and the less of an impact it is likely to have on your future foot health.

Treatments such as custom orthotics can help shift excess pressure away from sensitive areas over the long term, greatly reducing risks of sores and other problems before they have a real chance to develop. Prescribed forms of stretching, exercise, and physical therapy can also provide long-term benefits.

# Diabetic Shoes & Inserts

For most patients, shoes are where their feet spend the most time. Every measure should be taken to ensure that all that time is spent in something that fully supports and protects the feet, and never in anything that has the potential to cause irritation or harm.

Customized diabetic shoes and inserts can be prescribed to provide cushioning, protection, and support that is specific to the exact needs of each patient. They are made exactly to the shape and needs of an individual patient's feet, and their feet alone.

Diabetic shoes and inserts are made of breathable materials with much less risk of causing irritation to the feet than other materials. Internal designs are seamless, providing even fewer opportunities for pressure points or "hot spots" to develop in the footwear.

There are several options for diabetic shoes and inserts available, each better suited for specific needs than others. We highly recommend that diabetic patients consider them as part of their overall diabetic foot care plan, and will happily discuss what types of options might be best for their particular situation and risks.





# Safer Care for Common Conditions

Ingrown toenails, blisters, warts and other conditions that are commonly treated at home can easily become more complicated for diabetic patients. What might start as a seemingly simple problem may worsen without proper care and could become infected.

When necessary, we can treat conditions in a much safer and more sterile way than can be done at home. We may not always recommend that you come to see us for every problem, and may advise you on home steps for more minor concerns. But if matters don't improve or a professional approach is needed, we will be here to help.



## Comprehensive Wound Care When Necessary

If an injury has progressed to a diabetic wound or ulcer, it should always be professionally addressed as soon as possible.

We provide full and safe care for diabetic wounds, both in proper cleaning and dressing of the injury and in aiding recovery.

We employ both traditional and advanced methods in our treatment plans, including measures that can aid in accelerating the healing of ulcers and open wounds. The sooner that wounds fully heal, the lower the risk of infection and other complications.



# A Better Future for Your Feet Starts Now

Being diagnosed with diabetes can change a lot about the way you have to approach many elements of your life. We know it's not always fun, and often doesn't seem fair, but that's why we're here to help patients keep the potential complications of diabetes out of their future as much as possible.

The more steps that you and we can take now to maintain healthier circulation, reduce nerve damage, and keep your feet moving well, the less of an impact diabetes is likely to have on your comfort and mobility in the future. It takes some time, some effort, and some determination, but trust us when we tell you those investments are very much worth it!

Regardless of how much diabetes may have already affected your foot health, we want to help you fight back. Never hesitate to contact the experts at Midwest Podiatry Centers with any questions, concerns, or needs you may have.



## Start Your Journey Toward Healing

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