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Foot Care for DIABETICS

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Diabetic neuropathy is a type of nerve damage that can occur if you have diabetes. Having too much glucose in your blood affects the nerves in the extremities of your body, and it most often damages the nerves in the legs and feet. Hence, you might not be aware of the presence of cuts or sores on your feet, as the damages to

the nerves in the region will keep you from feeling the pain.

According to podiatrist, Lim Yuanshuang, if these wounds are not treated, they can lead to an infection which could put you at risk of eventually losing a toe, foot or leg.

Common diabetic foot complications

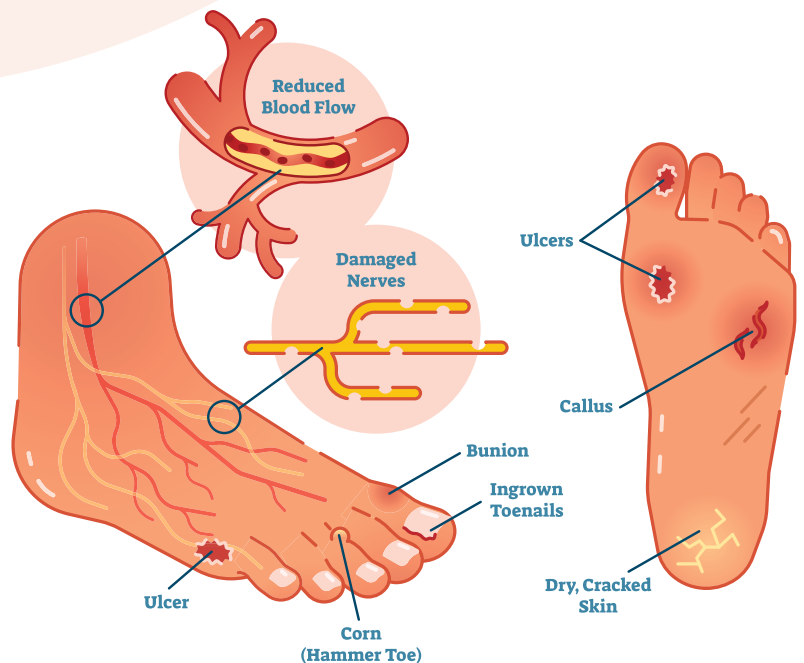
Blisters

If you have diabetic neuropathy and lose sensitivity in your legs, you may not notice if you've stepped on something sharp or if your shoes have been rubbing your foot on the same spot causing blisters.

Calluses

Calluses are thick, hardened layers of skin that develop on the bottom of the feet. They tend to appear at the pressure points of the feet.

"These are the points that are likely to turn into ulcers. If your feet continue to rub in these spots and you don't feel the pain or do anything about it, the calluses may rub farther into



your tissue, break down, and turn into ulcers," Yuanshuang says.

Diabetic foot ulcers

An ulcer is a break in the skin that allows bacteria to enter and cause infection. According to Yuanshuang,

if an ulcer becomes infected and the infection reaches the bone, it could put you at risk of amputation.

"If you notice an ulcer, it's important to go to your doctor to get treated immediately," she adds.



Take precautions against signs of trouble

On top of going to your doctor for regular medical check-ups to keep your diabetes under control, you should also have your foot health assessed.

Get a neurovascular assessment

Have a medical professional assess the severity of diabetic neuropathy and how good your blood flow is at the feet. "We check the pulses and the blood pressure of the feet, and we also can assess how well a person heals from a cut. If a person doesn't heal well and has low blood flow at the feet, we will refer him or her to a vascular surgeon for further assessment," Yuanshuang explains.

Check for hard skin

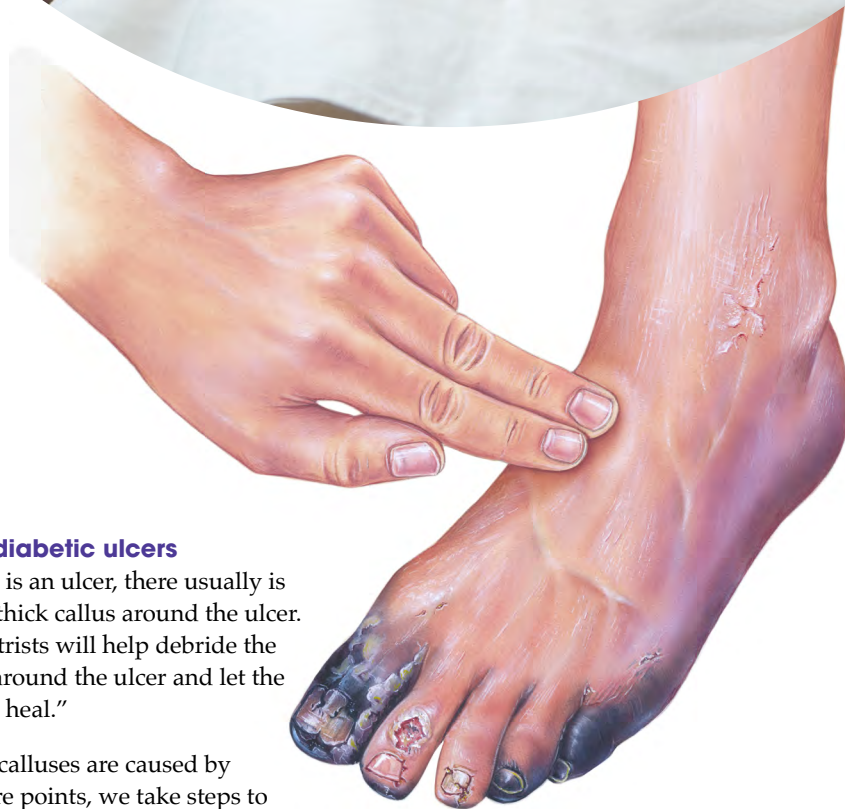
"If you have hard skin on your feet, a podiatrist can help gently debride the hard skin so that it doesn't build up into a callus," Yuanshuang says.

"I wouldn't encourage diabetics to get their feet filed by pedicurists. Most pedicure centres use public files that are very sharp and can cut easily. Unhygienic conditions can increase the risk of bacteria transmission and infections," she adds.

Treat diabetic ulcers

If there is an ulcer, there usually is a very thick callus around the ulcer. "Podiatrists will help debride the callus around the ulcer and let the wound heal."

"Since calluses are caused by pressure points, we take steps to offload pressure from those areas by prescribing paddings and orthotics. These will help the ulcer heal."



Tips for healthy feet

Inspect your feet daily

Use your hands to feel for hard skin or cuts on your feet. "If you have a cut, you would feel fluid around the

area. It's important to be aware if you have any foot problems," Yuanshuang advises.

If you can't reach your toes, have someone help you cut your toenails

If this is the case for you, it is advised to get your

toenails cut by a diabetic nurse or a podiatrist.

Don't cut your nails too short

Toenails that are cut too short promote ingrown toenails. Ingrown toenails happen when the corners or edges of your toenails grow into the surrounding skin. It can cause pain, swelling and infection.

Keep good hygiene

After a shower or if you wash your feet, make sure to dry your feet well, especially in the spaces between the toes. Wet feet tend to blister easier when rubbed. Also, if your toes aren't dried properly, fungal infection may occur.



Choose diabetic friendly footwear

Covered, well-fitting shoes

Yuanshuang advises, "Avoid slippers, loafers or any type of open-toed shoes. If you wear open-toed shoes, foreign objects can get into your shoes and injure your foot without you realising."

People with diabetes should also choose shoes with a broad toe box. Don't choose shoes that are narrow and

will squeeze your feet. If you wear tight shoes, your shoes would constantly rub against your feet, causing your feet to grow calluses.

Cushioned shoes

"When you're shopping for shoes, put your hands inside the shoe to feel its base. It should feel thick and well cushioned," Yuanshuang says.

Seamless socks

Choose seamless socks to prevent rubbing and blistering. Don't wear socks that are ribbed or have thick seams at the area where the toes bend.

