

FOOT HEALTH: DO'S & DON'T'S FOR OLDER ADULTS WITH DIABETES

No matter how old or young you are, when your feet hurt the rest of your body hurts too. Foot problems are especially common in older people. An estimated 80 percent of people over 50 suffer from painful age-related foot conditions that affect their ability to enjoy everyday activities like walking around the neighborhood, taking a toddler for a stroll around the block, hiking in the park, getting up and down stairs, shopping for groceries, and other activities of daily living.

Older adults with diabetes are at even greater risk for developing age-related foot conditions that cause loss of feeling, painful feet, and other uncomfortable conditions such as:

- sores or infections that don't heal
- dry cracked skin that may become infected
- ingrown toenails
- blisters, corns and calluses
- loss of sensation in the feet
- bunions, hammertoes and other foot deformities

Understanding the effects of diabetes on foot health will ease your older parent's pain and reduce the risk of serious foot conditions that can affect your older relative's ability to walk comfortably and safely

HEALTHY FEET BEGIN WITH ONE "DON'T" AND SIX "DO'S"

DON'T: wear shoes without socks. Shoes and socks are essential to preventing painful blisters and poor circulation that can cause serious damage to feet and legs over time

DO:

- Buy only shoes that fit properly and are comfortable. Take time in the shoe store "test walk" several kinds of shoes until your parent finds a pair that feel just right.
- Encourage your older parent to keep his blood sugar under good control to prevent diabetes-related foot problems – and other serious diabetes health conditions.
- Ask your relative's doctor to refer your parent to a doctor who specializes in foot care for regular checkups. Treating foot problems early can prevent foot disorders from developing corns, calluses, hammer toes and other painful conditions that interfere with your relative's ability to walk.

- Have a variety of lotions, creams and Vaseline available for treating dry skin on your parent's feet. He or she might enjoy a foot massage after a bath or shower.
- Remind your older relative to check his or her feet daily and look for cuts, sores, swelling, red spots, skin or nail infections. He or she should see the podiatrist to determine if they need treatment.
- If your parent has poor vision or stiff joints it may be difficult for her to look for signs and symptoms of foot problems. Examine her feet regularly. Contact her doctor if her feet don't begin to heal after one day. Treatment may be needed to prevent infection.

SHOP AROUND FOR SHOES

Ask your older relative if she remembers when it used to be fun to go shoe-shopping back when you wore stylish shoes almost everyday. Now you both are more interested in comfort instead of style so take your time and enjoy finding the shoe that's comfortable for aging feet.

Tips for choosing footwear:

- Remind your older relative not to wear shoes without socks. They help prevent calluses, corns and bunions. Shoes, socks and stockings should be changed daily.
- If comfortable shoes are hard to find a podiatrist may suggest custom-made inserts or special shoes to accommodate his feet. Ask the podiatrist if Medicare covers the cost of inserts.
- Check shoes regularly and replace worn-down heels and soles, and frayed shoelaces. Purchase new shoes when old ones are no longer comfortable or need extensive repairs.
- If your relative has Medicare Part B insurance some of the cost of special shoes or inserts may be covered. Her doctor or podiatrist can tell her how to obtain orthopedic shoes.

HEALTHY FEET FOR A HEALTHY LIFE!

As people age they may need the skills and advice of a podiatrist – a medical doctor who specializes in caring for feet. Suggest that your older relative schedule podiatric health care check-up with either her primary care doctor or a podiatrist to assess her feet and abilities to walk, drive and manage other activities of daily living.

Before the appointment, spend some time with your parent and help her make a list of questions about her foot health along with any foot symptoms that he or she has noticed.

Ask the doctor if changes can be made in her physical abilities, shoes, or lifestyle that will make it possible for her to remain active and safe at home.

Most caregivers are willing to help their older relative make changes in his environment that will help him remain safe and active. Learn as much as you can about your parent's foot health and what his or her limitations might be. [774-1/6/11 rev. ed.]