

DIABETIC FOOT CARE IN WARM WEATHER

As the weather gets warmer, the needs and risk factors for diabetic patients will change. In some ways, the measures people with diabetes should take to protect their feet are not very different from what everyone else should be doing. However, the consequences of poor foot care for this population could be far worse, so it is important for them to know what to avoid.

There are two primary factors which put diabetic patients at increased risk for foot wounds. One is that people with diabetes commonly suffer from neuropathy—a problem with the nervous system which makes them less likely to notice if they are being injured. The other is that people with high blood sugar levels have a more difficult time fighting off infections. In warm weather, people often go barefoot or wear shoes such as sandals and flip-flops which offer minimal protection. As a result, they are much more likely to suffer scratches and burns which, if they are neuropathic, they may not be aware of until infection sets in, and if they have high blood sugar, may be severe enough to result in hospitalization or amputation.

A third seasonal risk, which affects people in general, is that open-toed shoes allow feet to dry out faster. This is a problem because dry skin breaks more easily. To reduce their chances of injury, people with diabetes should avoid ever going barefoot and stick to close-toed shoes as much as possible. Patients who haven't recently been tested for neuropathy should never assume that they would be able to feel if sand or pavement is too hot to walk on. Because some people with diabetes experience increased swelling in high temperatures, it is important for them to wear compression socks, all other risks of going barefoot aside. Though these socks may cause their feet to sweat a lot and need to be changed frequently, they are necessary to ensure healthy blood flow.

On a more positive note, warm weather often encourages people to exercise, which is crucial to controlling glucose. It is important to remember that swimming in opaque water in natural settings poses a risk of cuts from unseen objects. Running shoes should be selected for the patient's arch shape and replaced when they are worn down. And, like everyone else, patients with diabetes should put sunscreen on their feet (including their toes) when they do go barefoot and regularly check their feet for injuries. But with the proper precautions, there's no reason why patients with diabetes can't have fun in the sun.