



EUROPEAN ACADEMY OF
DERMATOLOGY AND VENEREOLOGY

Information Leaflet for Patients

DIABETIC FOOT SYNDROME

The aim of this leaflet

This leaflet is designed to help you understand more about diabetic foot syndrome. It tells you what this condition is, what causes it, what can be done, and practical advice for managing this condition.

DIABETIC FOOT SYNDROME

What is diabetic foot syndrome?

Diabetes, when present over a long period of time with high blood sugar levels, often leads to damaged peripheral nerves, blockage of the blood flow within small and larger arterial blood vessels, and impairment of the local skin-associated immune response. All in all, this damage often manifests itself as diabetic foot syndrome.

What are the signs and symptoms of diabetic foot syndrome?

The most important symptoms of diabetic foot syndrome are:

1. decreased sensitivity of both feet with often prickling-like nerve sensations,
2. reduced blood flow,
3. dry, *fissured* (cracked) skin,
4. frequent bacterial or fungal infections.

The main problem is also that diabetic patients do not feel *micro traumas* (small injuries) in both feet, which often lead to the development of large *necrotic* wounds (dead tissue). This is the reason why patients with diabetic foot syndrome undergo amputation hundreds of times more often compared to patients without the condition.

In order to identify diabetic foot syndrome, if you have long-standing diabetes, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I have a lot of *wheals* (welts or hives) on my feet?
- Is the skin of my feet tight, dry, and freckled?
- Do I suffer from a fungal infection of the feet?
- When I touch my feet with a sharp object, do I feel that or not?
- Do I have blood stains in my stockings or shoes?

How is diabetic foot syndrome treated?

Sufficient treatment of diabetes leads to a clear improvement of the situation of the nerves and the blood vessels. However, as you know, such treatment needs a lot of cooperation from your side and your involvement in your diabetes care can help make it successful.

In order to prevent the development of large wounds or even an amputation, it is of utmost importance that you understand the following directions. Obesity must be fought by choosing the right diet.

No smoking, no alcohol (or only a small amount), and a lot of sports are necessary to support the medical and dietary treatment of diabetes.

What is practical advice for taking care of diabetic foot syndrome?

1. React fast

If you see a wound on your feet, then it is extremely important to react as soon as possible. Moreover, the wound should be treated by a group of specialists including dermatologists, diabetologists, neurologists, podiatrists, nurse specialists in diabetes, and specialists in nutrition. Such cooperation between different specialties is often found in wound centers specialized in diabetic feet.

2. Examine your feet regularly

When you suffer from diabetes, it is very important that you examine your feet on a regular basis. You can do that by using a small mirror in your hands. In addition, you should look at your toes, nails, and the *interdigital* spaces (between the toes). Do not forget that small lesions can lead to extreme damage of the foot.

3. Wear the right shoes and stockings

In addition, you should wear shoes which are loose and soft. Initially, new shoes should be worn for a short period of time only. Immediately after removing these new shoes, look for skin damage. Stockings should also be loose without constriction.

4. Take special care of your feet

Take regular care of your feet. Wash them with water that is not warmer than 37°C, using a soft washcloth and pH-neutral soap. When drying your feet, be especially careful in drying the *interdigital* spaces. After washing your feet, a *urea*-containing cream should be used. Don't forget to diminish *hyperkeratotic plaques* (thickened patches of skin) of the foot by using specific rubber/pumice stones.

Overall, you can do a lot to prevent the development of diabetic foot syndrome, and if you already suffer from this condition, your high motivation and actions can deter the development of chronic wounds or even the worst scenario of amputation. However, don't forget to see your physician/clinician once a year for an in-depth examination of your feet. ■