

## **Diabetic Athletes Face More Foot Injuries Than Nondiabetic Athletes**

Foot and ankle injuries are commonplace among all athletes, weekend warriors and high-performance athletes alike, but diabetic athletes are at a significantly greater risk to sustain stress fractures, sprains and other foot and ankle injuries than nondiabetic athletes.

According to foot and ankle experts, a key reason diabetic athletes are more susceptible to foot injuries is that many diabetics have neuropathy, the diminished sensation from nerve damage in the foot.

Many diabetic athletes are simply not aware that they've been injured or have pain, and this is when bad things can happen. A diabetic will often continue their normal routine while injured and cause more damage.

In addition to neuropathy (nerve damage), diabetic athletes have the other foot problems associated with diabetes. Diabetic foot problems can include poor circulation coupled with a compromised immune system that increases the risk of infection and the restricted delivery of oxygen and other nutrients to the affected area.

While this does not mean that diabetic athletes must stay away from sports and exercise, it does mean that they should make sure they are wearing the right shoe and have regular foot examinations. Exercise is important and especially beneficial to the diabetic. The point is that diabetic athletes must take special care of their feet.

I recommend that diabetic athletes take the following measures to prevent foot injuries and problems:

- Inspect feet before and after exercise, and everyday regardless of whether or not you exercise. Look for unexplained swelling, blisters, or redness around the foot and toes. Check between toes for athlete's foot.
- Select shoes that provide good cushioning and shock absorption. The shoes should have a rigid heel counter and crepe or EVA soles. They should have a rounder, deeper toe box, and should have laces that can be adjusted and tightened as opposed to velcro or other types of fasteners. Ask your foot and ankle specialist what shoe is best for you!
- Always inspect the inside of the shoe for foreign objects or a torn lining that could cut or injure the foot. Also inspect for comfort and space.
- Get in the habit of changing shoes every four to five hours. The longer shoes are worn the more they stretch and lose their supportive function.
- If there is an injury, redness or swelling, get treated early.
- Have your foot and ankle surgeon or health care provider identify your foot type for shoe recommendations or orthoses (custom insoles) to provide cushioning and support.

-Spend a good amount of time warming up prior to exercise, and include foot and ankle stretching

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