

Foot Ulcers Affect 15 Percent of all Diabetic Patients

According to a leading diabetes expert with the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons, some 2.4 million diabetes patients, representing 15 percent of the estimated 16 million Americans afflicted with the disease, will develop a serious foot ulcer during their lifetime.

Ulcers and other foot complications are responsible for 20 percent of the nearly 3 million hospitalizations every year related to diabetes. Unfortunately, many of these patients eventually must undergo lower extremity amputations as a result of infection brought on by untreated foot ulcers.

Foot ulcers in diabetic patients often are the outcome of sensory neuropathy, a common complication of the disease in which patients lose feeling at the bottom of the feet and are unable to react to pain, pressure and heat. Unrecognized repetitive trauma or pressure can produce calluses that, without proper attention, eventually can progress to ulcers.

Early detection of risk factors associated with ulcer formation is essential in the overall management of diabetic patients and can significantly reduce the incidence of ulcers and eventual amputation.

The major risk factors include: sensory neuropathy, vascular disease, susceptibility to infection, structural deformities (such as bunions and hammertoes and Charcot foot), age, duration of the disease, blindness, previous ulcers and the ongoing presence of calluses. Environmental or external risks include living alone, minor foot trauma, frostbite, burns and self removal of calluses and corns.

Prompt and aggressive treatment of foot ulcers can prevent worsening and help accelerate healing. Diligent self care also is a key component for early detection.

We at Cumberland Foot and Ankle recommend that diabetic patients inspect their feet every day, wear shoes that fit properly and minimize pressure, and maintain their blood glucose levels within the desired range. Regular visits to your foot and ankle specialist for removal of calluses and ingrown toenails provide an opportunity to reinforce self-care behavior and detect new or impending foot problems.