

How often or when should you see a podiatrist?



The answer ideally is “Often”; as for when, the answer is “No time like the present.” As you will hear from two of PPMA’s Board Members below, don’t wait for your feet to become intolerably painful or for that ulcer to grow acute. Especially if you are diabetic or suspect you’re diabetic. Note that the American Diabetes Association recommends at least a yearly foot exam by a podiatric specialist.

“Frequent Patient Evaluation and Education is Key” by Jane Pontious, DPM

THE AGE FACTOR

As we age, so do our feet—

- We lose the amount of fat in our feet, placing more pressure on our bones.
- Our ligaments aren't as strong as they used to be and our tendons have less flexibility.
- We develop arthritic conditions that make it more difficult for us to continue to be active comfortably.
- We no longer can wear those stylish shoes without pain.

The fact is that the number of people in the United States aged 65 or older are projected to more than double to 98 million by 2060; with the 65 or older number increasing from 15 percent of the population to 24 percent of the population.¹

Surprisingly, many of the patients I see in this age group didn't even know what a podiatrist does and have never seen one until that day. Many of those patients could have been living with healthier feet, which as we all know leads to a healthier life if they had seen a podiatrist sooner. Patient evaluation and education is key.

Our elder population, feel and act years younger than the people of my parents and grandparents age, likely due to better health education and the advances in medicine. We work longer and harder now and this projection will continue to rise by 2022, including a large increase in the number of women in the workplace.¹ Patients want to be more active; and podiatrists can help them by early recognition of their foot problems, and more importantly, preventative care to keep them moving more comfortably.

THE DIABETES FACTOR

A large group of our patient population is the diabetic patient. The diabetic population alone is rapidly increasing. In 2014, the CDC reported an estimated 22 million diabetics in the United States, which was a fourfold increase since 1980.² About 60 percent of all non-traumatic lower-limb amputations among people aged 20 years or older occur in people with diagnosed diabetes.³

Podiatrists know the importance of evaluating the lower extremities of diabetic patients, particularly the neuropathic patient. It is more often than we'd like that we see a patient with an infection too late or an unnoticed foreign body already causing damage. I never consider any diabetic risk assessment appointment routine because the condition of their feet is constantly changing, needing frequent evaluation and care.

THE "An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure" FACTOR

The public needs to realize just how important it is to see a podiatrist on a regular basis. Primary care physicians are good at referring diabetic patients for evaluation, but how often do they send non-diabetics for foot evaluations?

All patients can be at risk, but those patient populations that include diabetes, obesity, and peripheral vascular disease are at a higher risk. Children often go years with undiagnosed foot conditions that could have been corrected or treated if seen sooner. The same goes for athletes.

But all patients, even those who consider themselves healthy, can benefit from podiatric education and foot care. We are the most highly trained foot and ankle experts in the world, providing a wide range of care for problems of the lower extremity. Only through frequent periodic examinations can we help to be proactive in discussing foot health and preventive medicine through patient education.

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1. Mather, Mark. "Fact Sheet: Aging in the United States." *Fact Sheet: Aging in the United States*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Feb. 2017.
2. "Number (in Millions) of Civilian, Non-Institutionalized Persons with Diagnosed Diabetes, United States, 1980-2014." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 01 Dec. 2015. Web. 23 Feb. 2017.
3. "Statistics About Diabetes." *American Diabetes Association*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Feb. 2017.

"Podiatrists Take Diabetes Seriously, Do You?"

By Paul C. LaFata, DPM

I always tell my patients that you can take control of your health, like diabetes if you manage blood sugars by watching what you eat and exercise regularly, along with regular visits to a podiatrist. Exercise has a profound effect on our physical and emotional well-being, and can drastically affect blood sugars.

Unmanaged blood sugars could mean bad news in general for your feet—

- Leading to peripheral neuropathy, and small vessel disease.
- In the face of infection, high blood sugars don't allow for a normal cellular response.
- Infections can spread and affect adjacent tissues.

The problem in making a diabetic understand the seriousness of the disease is the fact these ill effects occur progressively over time, and typically are NOT seen immediately.

So never wait to see a podiatrist if you have concerns with your foot or ankle. Often, once the damage appears it cannot be reversed. This should be your wakeup call. But even if you are seeing the effects of poor diabetic management, you can still work to improve your health. It is never too late.

As podiatrists, we can't emphasize enough to patients (with or without diabetes) the difference seeing a podiatrist can make for preventing much worse foot complications, like irreversible ones when an amputation is looming.



I always review with my diabetic patients, the daily do's--

- Check sugars, check bottoms of your feet, as well as in-between toes. If can't see your feet, then someone else needs to inspect them.
- Don't ignore rest pain.
- Wear properly fitting shoes.
- Any blisters, cuts, or scrapes should be evaluated by a podiatrist.
- Always wear shoes; checking socks and shoes for foreign objects before wearing them.
- If you haven't exercised in years, start slowly. Gradually build up to your exercise goals. Completing a 5K race is a place to start, even if it is a walking 5K.
- Wear clean socks daily, avoiding those with elastic bands.
- Do not try and remove corns or calluses on your own, and definitely stay away from over-the-counter chemical removers.
- Use moisturizer on feet, but not in-between toes.
- In colder months, do not use a heating pad on your feet nor place feet close to a heating source such as fireplace or heating register.

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