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Back to the Basics: Diabetes and Foot Care

Foot care is an important part of diabetes management. Because diabetes can cause numbness or tingling in the feet, you may not know when they have been injured. Untreated foot injuries can cause infection, and in severe cases lead to surgery or even amputation. Therefore, it is important to catch problems early. To protect your feet, go to your health care provider annually for a thorough foot exam and get in the habit of checking your feet daily for any signs of injury or infection.

Daily Foot Care:

 Look at both feet every day. Examine the top, bottom, and sides of each foot, as well as between your toes. Do this when you are putting on or taking off your shoes and socks. Notice any cracks, bruises, calluses, cuts, ingrown toenails, blisters, redness, or swelling. If you cannot see the bottoms of your feet, use a hand mirror or have someone else look for you. If you see a problem and it is severe call your doctor right away. Also call your doctor for a less serious injury if it does not clear up in 24 hours or gets worse.

 Wash your feet with a mild soap and warm water daily. Dry your feet carefully, especially between your toes.
 Apply lotion, but not between your toes.
 Keep your toenails neatly trimmed. Cut your toenails straight across and file down the edges so they are rounded. Ask for help if you cannot see well enough to do this yourself.
 Inspect your shoes every day. Feel the inside of your shoes for torn linings, pebbles, and anything else that does not belong. Always shake your shoes out before putting them on.
 DO NOT go bare or sock-footed. Protect your feet with shoes or slippers.
What shoes are best to wear?

- **Wear shoes that are comfortable and fit your feet.** Make sure you can wiggle your toes. Have your feet measured the next time you buy a pair of shoes to be sure you are wearing the right size.
- **Don’t wear tight, high-heeled, or pointed shoes.**
- **Avoid open-toe or open-back shoes.**
- **Change into clean socks every day.**

Does Diabetes Cause Brittle Bones?

Research shows a link between type 1 diabetes and osteoporosis, although no one is exactly sure why. It may be that insulin, the hormone that is deficient in type 1 diabetes, promotes bone growth. Since people with type 1 generally develop it at a young age, the bones may not have enough time to mature.

There may also be a link between osteoporosis and type 2 diabetes. Although people with type 2 generally have a much higher bone densities than people with type 1, they still are more likely to have a bone fracture than the general population. This may be due to the loss of vision and nerve problems that often accompany diabetes. Also, a large percentage of people with type 2 diabetes do not exercise regularly. Exercise can reduce fracture risk.

What are some ways to prevent or manage osteoporosis?

- **Eat right:** A diet rich in calcium and vitamin D helps support healthy bones. Good sources of calcium are low-fat and non-fat dairy products, dark green, leafy

- vegetables and calcium-fortified foods and beverages.
- **Exercise:** Exercise makes bones stronger. Weight-bearing exercises like jogging, dancing, walking, and stair climbing are the best for bone health. Exercise also increases flexibility and improves balance to reduce the risk of falling and breaking a bone.
- **Do not smoke or consume too much alcohol:** Smoking can cause early menopause in some women which speeds up the rate of bone loss. Smokers also absorb less calcium from their diets. Heavy drinkers have a higher risk for fractures because of poor nutrition and a greater chance of falling.
- **Get regular bone density tests:** As you get older, have your bone density tested every couple of years. The most common test is called a dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry test, or DEXA scan. This is a painless procedure that accurately measures bone density in the hips and spine.
Maintaining a healthy body weight may help control blood glucose levels and improve insulin sensitivity. These improvements could lower risk for diabetic complications and reduce the need for diabetes medication.

Reducing your risk of cardiovascular disease: Eating a variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, and legumes as part of a vegetarian diet can decrease risk for developing cardiovascular disease. These foods are generally low in cholesterol and saturated fat and high in fiber.

Medication: The FDA has approved several medicines for the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis in both men and post-menopausal women. There are also medications approved for treating osteoporosis due to cortisone use. Talk to your doctor to see if one of these medicines is right for you.

Eating a Vegetarian Diet with Diabetes: Are There Benefits?

While eating a vegetarian diet will not cure diabetes, it may improve symptoms. There are many different types of vegetarian diets, but the most common are:

- **Vegan:** Only plant foods are consumed. No eggs, meat, poultry, fish, seafood or dairy foods.
- **Lacto-vegetarian:** Dairy foods are consumed, but not eggs or meat, poultry or fish.
- **Lacto-ovo vegetarian:** Dairy foods and eggs are consumed but not meat, poultry or fish.

How could eating a vegetarian diet benefit people with diabetes?

- **Promotes a healthy weight:** People following a vegetarian diet generally eat fewer calories than people on a non-vegetarian diet. In particular, a person who eats a vegan diet is more likely to have a lower body mass index (BMI).

One study compared a vegan diet with a standard diet recommended by the American Diabetes Association. Over a 22 week period, the participants eating the vegan diet lowered their blood glucose levels and lost significantly more weight than those on the standard diabetes diet. The participants on the vegan diet lost on average 14 pounds, while those on the standard diet only lost 6.8 pounds.

People in the study said that the vegan diet was easy to follow because they did not have to control their portions or count calories. Forty-three percent of the participants who consumed the vegan diet went off some of their diabetes medicines or decreased their doses compared to 26%
of those on the standard diet. The A1C values, which measure a person’s long-term glucose control, fell 1.23 points in the vegan group, but only 0.38 points in the standard diet group.

While eating a vegetarian diet can have several positive benefits, it may not be right for everyone. If you are thinking about going on a vegetarian diet, talk with a dietitian to make sure that you will get enough calories and nutrients.

**Using Dietary Supplements with Diabetes**

People with diabetes are more likely to use dietary supplements than those who do not have diabetes. Dietary supplements come in a variety of forms including herbs, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals. If you are taking such supplements, you probably wonder how they affect your body.

However, finding reliable and accurate information about these products is difficult since the Food and Drug Administration does not regulate dietary supplements.

Many people think that since supplements are “natural,” they are always safe. This is not always true.

Some serious drug interactions may occur when dietary supplements are taken with other medications. For example, ginseng can interfere with the drug, warfarin’s ability to prevent blood clots. St. John’s wort, used to treat depression, may interact with other antidepressant medications, making them less effective. Garlic, ginger, and ginkgo can increase the risk for bleeding if you have surgery.

So how can you safely integrate dietary supplements into your medical care?

- Tell ALL your health care providers about ALL your supplements and why you are taking them, even multivitamins. Don’t wait for them to ask. You may want to provide a list or bring them to your medical appointments for them to see. For each one, tell how much you take, when you take it, and how long you have been taking it.

- Also, inform your health care providers if you plan to stop taking any supplements. This can also affect your medical management.

- Ask your pharmacist or other health care provider about possible side effects or drug interactions if you plan to take a new supplement. Discuss how that supplement will affect your blood glucose, blood pressure, cholesterol level, and other medical conditions.

- Never stop taking your diabetes medications without telling your doctor. A dietary supplement is not the same as a prescribed medication.
Greek Veggie and Turkey Wrap

This wrap is a healthy lunch option that you can eat on the go. It’s high in fiber and protein that will help you stay full. The tzatziki yogurt sauce adds an extra kick to the vegetables.

- 1 multigrain flat bread
- 2 Tbsp. tzatziki yogurt sauce
- 2 oz. roasted turkey breast
- ¼ whole avocado
- ½ cup spinach
- ½ cup sliced red bell pepper

1. Spread tzatziki sauce over flat bread with a knife.
2. Layer remaining ingredients on the wrap.
3. Carefully roll the flatbread up into a wrap. Enjoy!

*Makes 1 serving

If you cannot find tzatziki sauce at your local grocery store, here is an easy recipe you can whip up in no time.

- 2 cups plain low fat Greek yogurt
- 1 ½ cup fresh diced cucumbers
- 2 Tbsp. fresh dill, finely chopped
- 3 Tbsp. lemon juice
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- Salt and pepper to taste

Mix all ingredients together in a large bowl. If desired, season with more herbs or spices. Serve immediately.

*Makes about 16 – 2 tablespoon servings

Nutrition Analysis for the sandwich with commercial sauce:

- Calories: 261
- Carbohydrate: 27 grams
- Protein: 23 grams
- Fat: 10 grams
- Saturated Fat: 1 gram
- Cholesterol: 25 milligrams
- Sodium: 708 milligrams
- Fiber: 10 grams

Exchanges: 1 starch, 1 vegetable, 3 very lean meats, 2 fats

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Dear Friend,

Diabetes Life Lines is a bi-monthly publication sent to you by your local county Extension agent.

It is written by an Extension Nutrition and Health Specialist and other health professionals from the University of Georgia. This newsletter brings you the latest information on diabetes self-management, healthy recipes and news about important diabetes-related events.

If you would like more information, please contact your local county Extension Office.

Yours truly,

County Extension Agent

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