

Weekend Doctor

By **Dr. THOMAS F. VAIL.**

Earlier this year, celebrity chef Paula Deen caused controversy when she revealed that she was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes three years ago.

Type 2 diabetes is always in the news, but there is still much that doctors and scientists do not know about the disease. There are several risk factors including obesity, race, age, family history and high blood pressure.

Type 2 diabetes does not have to be an early death sentence. With proper medications and lifestyle changes, diabetics can live an active, enjoyable life. Once you have been diagnosed with diabetes, you will need to see your primary care physician regularly.

Many people do not know, but the feet can sometimes show the first signs of a diabetic issue.

Peripheral neuropathy is very common in type 2 diabetics. It is when diabetes affects the nerves and a person loses feeling in their feet.

For instance, if a diabetic with peripheral neuropathy stepped on glass, they wouldn't feel the pain. The only way a diabetic would know they were injured, is if they see the wound.

Some early signs of peripheral neuropathy are tingling, burning, itching and sometimes pain in the feet or legs.

We need good feeling in our feet. Imagine what would happen if you cut your foot and didn't know it for days or weeks. Unfortunately, this happens to diabetics all the time and this is how a diabetic wound begins to develop.

A diabetic wound is an open sore usually under the ball of the foot. They can be difficult to treat, especially if they are infected. If an infection gets really bad, amputation of a toe or part of the foot may be a possibility.

In fact, diabetics are 30 to 40 times more like to undergo a major amputation.

The most important thing a podiatrist can do is catch a peripheral neuropathy problem before it becomes bigger.

Your podiatrist can debride, or shave down, calluses on the bottom of your feet. Calluses are common sites for diabetic wounds.

Constant rubbing from the inside of a shoe or rough surfaces can break the skin and lead to wounds. Your podiatrist can prescribe custom orthotics and make pads that can be used to reduce friction on the feet.

If a foot exam reveals that you have peripheral neuropathy and you have not been diagnosed with diabetes, then your podiatrist will refer you to the right physician so you can be tested for diabetes and begin treatment, if needed.

It is also important for diabetics who are over the age of 50 to have a test for peripheral artery disease, which occurs when there is a buildup of cholesterol and plaque in the arteries of the lower extremities, causing decreased blood flow to the legs and feet. This can lead to a poorly healing wound in your feet and increased risk of amputation.

If you have been recently diagnosed with diabetes, then you may have even more control of how the disease affects your life. Stay away from Paula's bread pudding, follow your treatment plans and make an appointment with your podiatrist.



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