Common Diabetic Skin Problems

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Diabetes and Skin Problems

Diabetes and skin problems go hand in hand. In fact, up to one third of diabetics will experience a problem with their skin at some point, often when they begin to neglect their diabetes management plan. Fortunately, learning to spot the symptoms of common skin conditions early can help you clear up the discomfort quickly, and get back on a healthy track.

Common Skin Conditions in Diabetics

Skin is an organ, and like other organs, it can feel the effects of a chronic illness. From poor blood circulation to insulin resistance and volatile blood glucose levels, different types of imbalances within the body will surface in different ways:

- **Bacterial infections**. Styes, boils, and infections around the nail and hair follicles are common bacterial infections. In many cases, the culprit is Staphylococcus (also known simply as a staph infection), and it tends to bring swelling and pain. Although anybody can contract a bacterial infection in their skin, diabetics are far more prone to them, especially if blood sugar levels are neglected.
- **Fungal infections**. Athlete's foot, vaginal infections, and jock itch are common fungal infections, most of which cause redness, itching and uncomfortable blisters. Candida albicans – one of the most common fungal infections for diabetics – generally shows up as red, scaly patches (sometimes with tiny blisters) in the warm, moist folds of the skin.
- **Itching**. A general discomfort with a range of causes, skin itch is a nuisance, but often managed with extra moisturizing, gentler soap, and exercise to promote better circulation.
- **Vitiligo.** More common in cases of Type 1 diabetes than Type 2, this disorder affects the pigments in the skin. By destroying the cells that build pigment, vitiligo results in patches of discoloured skin on the abdomen, chest, neck and face.
- **Foot blisters and ulcers.** Neuropathy (or nerve damage) brought on by diabetes can lead to some painful, and possibly serious, eruptions on the feet. When you lose sensation in your feet, you're less likely to feel injuries, and small problems can become bigger sores or infections before you realize it.

There are other, less common skin conditions that can develop in cases of extremely high fat or sugar levels in the blood, including eruptive xanthomatosis (firm yellow bumps), digital sclerosis (thick, tight skin on the backs of the hands), and acanthosis nigricans (dark, thick patches in the folds of skin).

When to See a Doctor

It can be tempting to clean the area, slap on a Band-Aid and wait for healing to begin, but even simple skin issues can call for a doctor's perspective when you suffer from diabetes. Be sure to visit the doctor if you notice:

Signs of infection (redness, swelling, pus, and warmth at the site). Although bacterial or fungal infections

generally aren’t life-threatening, they will get worse and could lead to serious complications if not treated with the right medication.

Widespread rash. If you notice a raised, red area that is spreading, see your doctor to rule out disseminated granuloma annulare or necrobiosis lipoidica diabeticorum (NLD), two itchy, rash-like conditions that should be treated with medication.

Any change in the skin should arouse your suspicion, and it’s better to pay your doctor a visit rather than wait to see if it clears. Many, if not most, diabetic skin problems can be avoided or improved with rigorous blood sugar monitoring and good skin hygiene, but it’s important to reach the right diagnosis to know what treatment will be best.