

# Aids and Your Feet

## Definition

There are thousands of people who become infected with HIV each day. HIV stands for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. This virus weakens the body's immune system so it is unable to do its job effectively. During the late stage of the HIV infection, AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) develops. People who are infected with HIV may not develop AIDS for many years. This means that people with HIV can appear to be healthy and normal but their health will eventually decline. It is important for people to understand that they can pass the virus to other people even though they have not developed AIDS at that point in time.

Different illnesses that affect AIDS patients include severe diarrhea, pneumonia, tuberculosis, skin cancer, fever and skin infections. Due to the body's weakened immune system, people infected with the AIDS virus are unable to fight off infections. In addition to these illnesses, people with AIDS often develop peripheral neuropathy. Peripheral neuropathy is a disease that affects the nerves located outside the central nervous system. Neuropathy leads to insensitivity, stiffness, and numbness in the feet. These problems can also lead to foot deformities such as Bunions, Hammer Toes, Metatarsalgia, and many others. These complications should be taken care of immediately to prevent more serious problems such as the development of ulcers and possibly even amputation.

## Cause

AIDS develops from the virus HIV. Scientists have traced the origin of the HIV virus to an African primate, specifically to a subspecies of the chimpanzee.

The HIV virus is found in fluids such as: blood, vaginal secretion, semen, and breast milk.

Therefore the virus can be passed on by the following:

- Sex with an infected person
- Passed from a mother to her unborn child
- Blood transfusions with infected blood
- Injections with nonsterilized equipment

One of the highest growing age groups infected with the HIV virus is young adults under the age of 25. They account for about half of all new HIV infections in the United States alone. AIDS is the second leading cause of death among people between the ages of 25 and 44.

## Peripheral Neuropathy

Approximately 30% of those infected with AIDS develop a condition called peripheral neuropathy.

Peripheral neuropathy is a disease of the nerves. These nerves are located outside the central nervous system. Neuropathy can cause insensitivity or a loss of ability to feel pain, heat, and cold.

People suffering from neuropathy can develop minor cuts, scrapes, blisters, or pressure sores that they may not be aware of due to their inability to sense pain. If these minor injuries are left untreated, complications may result and lead to ulceration and possibly even amputation. Neuropathy can also cause foot deformities such as Bunions, Hammer Toes, Metatarsalgia, and Charcot Feet.

It is very important for people with AIDS to take the necessary precautions to prevent all foot-related injuries. Due to the consequences of neuropathy, daily observation of the feet is critical. By following the necessary preventative foot care measures, you can reduce the risk of developing serious foot conditions.

## Treatment and Prevention

There is no vaccine or cure for the HIV virus that causes AIDS.

HIV is most frequently transmitted sexually. Because of this, the key to prevention is education. The best way for people to prevent the disease from spreading among the population is to know how to protect themselves from becoming infected.

People with AIDS are at high risk for developing neuropathy and other serious foot complications. Because of this fact, special attention must be focused on foot health management. Footwear and orthotics play an important role in footcare. Orthotics designed with Plastazote™ foam are recommended to protect the insensitive, neuropathic AIDS foot. Plastazote is a material designed to accommodate pressure “hot spots” by conforming to heat and pressure. By customizing to the foot, Plastazote provides superior comfort and protection for feet. For these reasons, footwear constructed with Plastazote is highly recommended for the people who have AIDS.

Footwear for people with AIDS should also provide the following protective benefits:

- High, wide toe box (high and wide space in the toe area)
- Removable insoles for fitting flexibility and the option to insert orthotics if necessary.
- Rocker Soles designed to reduce pressure in the areas of the foot
- Most susceptible to pain, most notably the ball-of-the-foot.
- Firm Heel Counters for support and stability.

If you have AIDS and are experiencing a foot problem, immediately consult with your foot doctor.



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