



AMERICAN PODIATRIC MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

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Regular Foot Care Can Prevent Diabetic Amputation

Many Americans know to associate fever with illness. However, healthcare professionals know that, when it comes to diabetes, some parts of a patient's body, from their hair to their toes, can aid in diagnosis.

Eight percent of the U.S. population has diabetes, but nearly six million people are undiagnosed. According to the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA), some foot problems can help doctors discover diabetes. Diabetes can cause nerve damage in people's feet, which can easily lead to amputation.

In the U.S., more than 60 percent of the patients who receive non-traumatic lower-limb amputations have diabetes. In 2004, almost 71,000 Americans with diabetes needed amputations. Luckily, most diabetic amputations can be prevented through vigilant footcare.

"Diabetes can cause patients to lose sensation in their extremities, therefore a person with diabetes might not notice injuries to their feet until serious infection occurs," said Ross Taubman, D.P.M., president of the APMA. "In most cases, patients can avoid amputation by working regularly with a podiatrist."

Once diagnosed, patients with diabetes can prevent amputation by creating a footcare plan. Plans should include annual checkups with a podiatrist and daily foot inspections. Those with the disease need to be especially careful about footcare and should work with a podiatrist to determine the best preventative treatments.

Early diagnosis can help prevent severe nerve damage. For patients at risk for developing diabetes, some foot conditions can be an early warning sign. According to the APMA, patients should see a podiatrist if they notice the following conditions:

- Calluses, blisters, or dry and cracked skin anywhere on the foot can imply poor circulation or foot health, especially if you don't feel them or they take two or more weeks to heal.
- Look for thin, fragile, shiny or hairless skin, which can denote decreased circulation to the foot.
- Check shoes for torn linings or foreign objects. If they don't irritate you when you walk, you might have nerve damage. Other warning signs include foot deformities like hammertoes, a past history of foot ulcers, or lower leg or thigh pain when walking.

For more information on preventing diabetes complications to the feet, visit the APMA's Web site at apma.org/diabetes.

