

DIABETES AND THE FOOT

Chronic hyperglycaemia (raised blood glucose levels) is usually associated with long-term damage to the body and the failure of various organs and tissues. People with diabetes are at risk of nerve damage (neuropathy) and problems with the blood supply to their feet (ischaemia). Nerve damage results in a reduced ability to feel pain, and injuries often go unnoticed. Ischaemia can slow down any wound healing. Both neuropathy and ischaemia can lead to foot ulcers. Infections in these wounds may ultimately result in amputation.

A few facts and figures

- **People with diabetes are 25 times more likely to lose a leg than people without the condition.**
- **Throughout the world, up to 70% of all leg amputations happen to people with diabetes.**
- **Somewhere in the world a leg is lost to diabetes every thirty seconds**
- **It is estimated that up to 85% of all amputations due to diabetes can be prevented.**
- **85% of diabetes-related lower extremity amputations are preceded by a foot ulcer.**
- **Many foot ulcers can be prevented with suitable healthcare and informed self-care.**
- **In developed countries one in every six people with diabetes will have an ulcer during their lifetime.**
- **In developing countries, foot problems related to diabetes are thought to be even more common.**
- **Foot problems account for up to 15% of healthcare resources in developed countries. In developing countries, it has been estimated that foot problems may account for as much as 40% of the total available resources.**

Management of the diabetic foot

The ideal management for the prevention and treatment of diabetic foot problems includes:

- Regular inspection of the diabetic foot
- Identification of the foot at risk
- Education of people with diabetes and healthcare professionals
- Appropriate footwear
- Rapid treatment of all foot problems

What are the warning signs?

It is important to know the warning signs in order to identify the foot at risk. These include:

- Swelling of the foot or ankle
- Very cold feet or legs

- Color changes red, blue or black discoloration
- Pain in legs at rest or while walking
- Open sores, no matter how small
- Non healing wounds
- In-growing toe nails
- Corns and calluses
- Lack of hair growth on the foot

References

- *Diabetes Atlas* second version, International Diabetes Federation, 2003
- More information on diabetes and foot care can be found in the World Diabetes Day 2005 leaflet "*Diabetes and Foot Care – Put Feet First Prevent Amputations*".

EXTRA INFORMATION:

The **International Diabetes Federation (IDF)** is the only global advocate for people with diabetes and their healthcare providers. The mission of IDF is to promote diabetes care, prevention and a cure worldwide. IDF is an umbrella organization of 185 member associations worldwide, representing millions of people with diabetes, their families, healthcare providers and specialists. IDF operates through a wide range of activities and tools, including education for people with diabetes, public awareness campaigns and the promotion of the free exchange of diabetes knowledge.

The **International Working Group on the Diabetic Foot (IWGDF)** is a worldwide organization whose initial goal was to establish an internationally accepted consensus on the diabetic foot. The *International Consensus on the Diabetic Foot* and the *Practical Guidelines on the management and the Prevention of the Diabetic Foot* were published in 1999. Since the launch the document has been translated and published in 25 languages. The IWGDF was acknowledged as an IDF Consultative Section in 2000.

For more information please contact

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