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Frequently Asked Questions Diabetes and the Feet

As the leading cause of non-traumatic, lower-limb amputations, diabetes is reaching epidemic proportions, now more than ever. It can have a devastating impact on the body, affecting numerous parts of the body including the eyes, mouth and feet. In fact, the feet, often overlooked at routine checkups, can reveal the first signs and symptoms of the disease. All too often, patients forget to take off their shoes and socks and ask their health care providers to inspect their feet. Close to 24 million people in the United States have diabetes and nearly 6 million people have it and do not even know it. That's why it's important to elect to save your feet whether you have the disease or not. Know the signs and symptoms of diabetes and have your feet checked **every** time you visit the doctor.

1. Why should I ask my doctor to take off my shoes and socks?

The feet, said to be mirrors of our general health, can reveal diabetes warning signs such as numbness, redness, swelling or non-healing wounds. Taking off your shoes and socks at every doctor's visit is critical to the prevention and treatment of systemic diseases such as diabetes.

2. Who is at risk for diabetes?

While many Americans are predisposed to have the disease based on family history, Hispanics, African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are more at risk. People with type 2 diabetes can do a great deal to lower their chances of getting the disease such as exercising regularly, reducing fat and calorie intake and losing weight.

3. What can happen if diabetes is not detected in its early stages?

Many people do not find out they have the disease until they develop serious complications such as foot ulcers. In fact, six million Americans with diabetes have not been diagnosed. The good news is that diabetes, although serious, can be managed. However, if left undiagnosed or untreated, it can damage the body and result in long-term complications such as lower-limb amputations, cardiovascular disease, stroke, blindness and kidney disorders.

4. I have been diagnosed with diabetes. What type of foot complications could I possibly experience?

You may experience the following symptoms:

- a loss of feeling in your feet.
- a change in the shape of your feet.
- foot ulcers or sores that do not heal.

Keeping your blood glucose (sugar) in good control and taking care of your feet every day can help you avoid serious foot problems.

5. Should I see a podiatrist if I have diabetes?

Treating diabetes requires a team approach. A podiatrist is an integral part of the treatment team. Your primary care doctor may refer you to a dietician, nurse educator, dentist, eye doctor and an exercise physiologist to help you manage the disease.

