

footprints

An informational newsletter for patients of APMA member podiatrists

Fall 2013

This November, Knock Your Socks Off!

If you are battling diabetes, you are not alone! Millions of Americans are fighting with you; young and old, male and female, African Americans and Caucasians. No one is immune to this growing epidemic. Hispanic Americans in particular are at risk of developing the disease. According to the American Diabetes Association, nearly 12 percent of the Hispanic population has diabetes. Even more importantly, Hispanic Americans are at a 66 percent increased risk of developing the disease when compared to other ethnicities.

November is Diabetes Awareness Month, and the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA) is encouraging all Americans with diabetes, and Latinos in particular, to learn more about the disease, how to manage it, and how to avoid complications in the feet.

Diabetic complications in the feet can be very dangerous. In fact, diabetes is the leading cause of lower-limb amputations that aren't the result of a traumatic injury. These complications and amputations can be prevented. With proper foot care from today's podiatrist, you can manage the effects of the disease on your feet. Podiatrists are uniquely qualified among medical professionals to treat the foot and ankle, based on their education, training, and experience.

Preventing diabetic complications requires communication with your podiatrist. Comprehensive foot care programs can reduce amputation rates by 45 to 85 percent. Today's podiatrists are qualified by their education, training, and experience to diagnose and treat conditions affecting the foot, ankle, and related structures of the leg, and podiatrists play an integral role in the diabetic management team.

- **Why should I "knock my socks off" and see a podiatrist?**
The feet can reveal diabetes warning signs such as numbness, redness, swelling, or non-healing wounds. Make at least two appointments a year with your podiatrist, the foot and ankle expert. Have your feet examined to avoid diabetic foot complications and amputation.
- **Should I talk about diabetes with my community, family, and friends?**
Yes! Those with diabetes, as well as those who are at risk, should openly discuss the disease with family members. Diabetes is often passed down from generation to generation, especially in the Hispanic community. Don't be embarrassed to talk about it with



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those closest to you; it's best to manage diabetes as a team.

- **Can I still see a podiatrist if I don't have medical insurance?**
Podiatrists work in health clinics, in addition to private practices, treating patients. Work directly with your podiatrist to create alternative options such as payment plans. Don't let a lack of insurance keep you from receiving proper foot care.
- **Is there a special kind of footwear available for those with diabetes?**
Yes. Certain types of shoes, socks, and custom orthotics are all created especially for those with diabetes. People with diabetes should never go barefoot and should make sure to keep their feet protected to reduce the risk of cuts and scrapes on the feet, which can lead to complications. Medicaid and Medicare often pay for these shoes.
- **What are diabetic ulcers, and how can I prevent them?**
Diabetic ulcers are often one of the first signs of complications from diabetes in the lower leg. These ulcers can stem from a small wound or cut on the foot that is slow to heal. If left untreated, ulcers can become harder to treat and could lead to amputation.

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Take our True/False Quiz

Find out how much you know about diabetes and foot care

1. Even though someone in my family has diabetes, I don't need to worry about it.
FALSE—Along with age and obesity, a family history of diabetes can increase your chances of developing diabetes.
2. I need to educate my family on the dangers of diabetes.
TRUE—Diabetes is a family affair. Everyone in the family should know about the disease and should be helping those with diabetes control it.
3. As long as my feet do not hurt, I don't need to visit a podiatrist.
FALSE—Diabetes can lead to loss of sensation or numbness of the extremities. You may not feel the pain, even if there is a significant problem. Any noticeable change in the feet such as redness, swelling, sores that don't heal, loss of hair, or scaly skin may indicate a more serious problem.
4. Having diabetes makes my feet more susceptible to common infections, such as athlete's foot and fungal toenails.
TRUE—People with diabetes have a decreased immune response, which can make common foot infections more prevalent.

If you or a loved one has diabetes, visit a podiatrist regularly and "knock your socks off" to keep your feet healthy.



KNOCK YOUR SOCKS OFF

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Know Your Diabetes Management Team

While diabetes affects the body negatively from head to toe, it can be controlled successfully with guidance and treatment from a team of medical specialists.

- **Primary Care Physician**—A family physician or internist plays the important role of coordinator. He or she is often the first doctor one sees after a diabetes diagnosis and makes referrals to other specialists on the treatment team.
- **Endocrinologist**—This specialist treats many internal diseases and is often called upon to care for a person with diabetes who is having difficulty controlling the disease.
- **Podiatrists**—Podiatrists are uniquely qualified to treat the foot and ankle. Diabetes can limit or restrict nerve function, as well as blood flow to the feet. Because of this problem, patients with diabetes can develop foot complications that may result in amputation if left untreated. If you have diabetes or are at risk of the disease, have a podiatrist check your feet at least twice a year for symptoms such as a loss of sensation, burning, or tingling.
- **Dentist**—Patients with diabetes are more susceptible to gum disease and infections in the mouth due to excess blood sugar, so keeping up with regular dental appointments is important.
- **Ophthalmologist/Optomist**—Similar to how diabetes restricts blood flow to the feet, diabetes can also affect blood flow to the eyes, resulting in diabetic eye disease. This condition is highly preventable if the disease is managed properly.
- **Vascular Surgeon**—Diabetes can increase the chances for development of several vascular diseases. Your risk of vascular disease increases with the length of time you have had diabetes, and your risk can increase if you have high blood pressure, if you smoke, are inactive, are overweight, or eat a high-fat diet.
- **Pharmacist**—Successfully managing diabetes usually requires taking prescription medication. Talk to your pharmacist to ensure you understand the risks of using over-the-counter (OTC) medications with prescribed medications.

Doctors of podiatric medicine are podiatric physicians and surgeons, also known as podiatrists, qualified by their education, training, and experience to diagnose and treat conditions affecting the foot, ankle, and related structures of the leg.