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National Diabetes Awareness Month focuses on foot health

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Andrea Blum

Photo courtesy of Michigan Podiatric Medical Association

Podiatrists of the Michigan Podiatric Medical Association remind us that healthy feet are essential for overall good health, no matter your age, fitness level, or physical challenges. For people with diabetes, however, taking care of their feet is especially vital. More than 60 percent of all non-traumatic lower-limb amputations worldwide are related to complications from the disease, according to the American Diabetes Association.

A 2012 study by the American Podiatric Medical Association indicates Hispanics with diabetes are particularly in danger, because more than 90 percent of those with the disease or at risk for it have never seen a podiatrist as part of their health care.

“The leading cause of hospitalization among people with diabetes—regardless of ethnicity—is foot ulcers and infections, but most of those problems are largely preventable,” said Jodie Sengstock, DPM, MPMA director of professional relations. “It’s important for those with the disease to receive regular foot exams by a podiatrist.”

While ulcers—open sores on the foot—are the most common diabetes-related foot problem, several others are also serious and prevalent, including neuropathy, skin changes, calluses, poor circulation, and infection. The nerve damage that diabetes causes may mean a person with an ulcer or injury may be unaware of it until it becomes infected. Infection can lead to partial or full amputation of the foot or lower leg. Regular care from a podiatrist can help reduce amputation rates between 45 and 85 percent, according to the APMA.

People with diabetes need to inspect their feet daily and be vigilant for warning signs of ulcers, including irritation, redness, cracked or dry skin (especially around the heels), or drainage on their socks.

“Although ulcers can occur anywhere on the foot or ankle, they are typically found on pressure points on the foot, like the ball of the foot or bottom of the big toe,” added Dr. Sengstock “If an ulcer is discovered, or other symptoms, a podiatrist should be seen immediately. In many cases, the foot can be saved with early treatment.”

In addition to examining feet every day, and keeping blood glucose in the target range, the MPMA advises following these foot health tips:

-Discuss diabetes and the risks with family members. Diabetes can be hereditary, so talk to family members about monitoring blood sugar and foot health.



-Never go barefoot. Always protect feet with the proper footwear and make sure socks and shoes are comfortable and fit well.

-Trim toenails straight across, and never cut the cuticles. Seek immediate treatment for ingrown toenails, as they can lead to serious infection.

-Keep feet elevated while sitting.

-Wiggle toes and move feet and ankles up and down for five-minute sessions throughout the day.

Source: Michigan Podiatric Medical Association

A horizontal banner with a light beige background. On the left is a photo of three women talking. Next to it is a yellow maple leaf logo followed by the text "Maple Heights RETIREMENT COMMUNITY". To the right, it says "ALLEN PARK, MICHIGAN" and "MapleHeightsSeniorLiving.com" with a Facebook icon. Below that is "A SPECTRUM RETIREMENT COMMUNITY & @". On the far right, a dark blue rounded rectangle contains the text "Fill your days with new friends & experiences!" in white.