

Are You at Risk?

By Dr. Roland Tolliver and Dr. Douglas Mason

There are over 82,000 lower extremity amputations each year due to the complications of diabetes at a cost of more than \$1.1 billion. These are just the hospital costs, not including surgeon fees, prosthetics, disability costs and time lost from work. The bad news is that the rate of people developing diabetes in the United States is increasing at a rate faster than at any time in history. The good news is that there are ways to help lessen and often prevent the possibility of a lower extremity amputation, which may include above the knee, below the knee and partial foot or the entire foot.

According to the National Diabetes Education Program, comprehensive foot care programs, most of which are directed by podiatric physicians, the risk of amputation can be reduced anywhere between 45% and 85%. It has been shown that wound care centers that include a podiatrist trained in wound care have more than a 50% lower amputation rate than those without. Podiatric physicians are trained in wound care, especially diabetic ulcers and related conditions, from their second year in podiatry college. The comprehensive training in treating corns, calluses, pressure areas, and bony protrusions or deformities is an integral part of their education in school and during post-graduate training. Many podiatrists seek additional training in wound management and diabetic foot care.

What can you do to lessen your risk?

A comprehensive foot care program includes:

- 1)** Early identification of the patient with a high-risk diabetic foot condition;
- 2)** Early diagnosis of foot deformities or foot problems;
- 3)** Early intervention designed to prevent or lessen the risk of additional deterioration of a condition that may lead to an amputation;
- 4)** Patient education about proper diabetic foot care and proper footwear.

Medicare and some private health insurances are aware of the high cost of amputations and in an attempt to provide preventive care allow for one pair of diabetic shoes and three pair of certain types of inserts for the diabetic population. Not all patients with diabetes qualify for the program- but many do.

This benefit has allowed our office and offices that participate with the program to aid our patients with diabetes in proper shoe selection and fitting in addition to the molding of appropriate orthoses (special inserts to prevent undue friction and irritation of the foot). This is often the most important step you can take to prevent the life altering and often life and/or limb-threatening effects of diabetes.

**If you are at risk,
*your podiatrist is there to help you.***