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## **Family Physicians Advise Diabetics to Take Care of Their Eyes and Feet**

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)—Diabetes causes the level of sugar in the blood to be higher than normal. A high blood sugar level can damage blood vessels and nerves.

Damage to blood vessels and nerves can lead to a number of problems including blindness and trouble with feet that can lead to amputation. To help prevent eye and foot problems, control blood sugar and cholesterol levels, blood pressure, exercise regularly, see your family physician regularly, eat a good diet, quit smoking and avoid alcohol.

“The eyes and feet, along with the kidneys, are of great importance to people with diabetes,” said Edward Bope, M.D., a family physician in Columbus, Ohio.

Retinopathy, caused by uncontrolled or poorly controlled diabetes, can damage the small blood vessels of the retina, the part of the eye that is sensitive to light and sends messages to the brain about what is seen. When blood vessels of the retina are damaged, fluid can leak and cause swelling in the macula, which is the part of the eye that gives sharp, clear vision.

If retinopathy worsens, the eye may begin to form new blood vessels over the retina, which are fragile and can easily break and bleed. Scar tissue may then form, which can cause the retina to break away from the back of the eye.

To take care of your eyes, have them checked at least once a year. Also, call your family physician if you experience blurred vision for more than two days, suddenly lose vision in one or both eyes, or see black spots, cobwebs or flashing lights that are not really there.

Diabetics can also have nerve damage, or diabetic neuropathy, that causes foot trouble. Signs of foot trouble include loss of feeling, sharp pain or tingling, sores, muscle weakness, and burning feeling in the feet. Because of this nerve damage, it may be difficult to notice blisters or sores on the feet. If blisters and sores are not taken care of, they can get worse and turn into ulcers. If ulcers become infected, hospitalization may be required or, in very serious cases, a foot amputated.

“If you have diabetes, you should examine your feet every day and rub in a cream that contains lanolin to keep the skin from cracking,” said Bope.

Diabetics can avoid foot problems by washing feet daily with lukewarm water with a mild soap; patting feet completely dry; keeping the skin of the feet smooth with cream or lotion; keeping feet dry with non-medicated powder before putting on socks and shoes; checking feet every day for redness, swelling, pain, numbness or tingling; cutting toenails straight across; not getting feet too hot or too cold; and not going barefoot.

If you are having any eye or foot problems, see your family physician.

*The Ohio Academy of Family Physicians is a statewide professional association with more than 4,400 members, including practicing physicians, family medicine residents and medical students. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, both sexes and every disease entity. Family physicians provide comprehensive, continuing care to all members of the family.*



## FACT SHEET

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### **Family Physicians Advise Diabetics to Take Care of Their Eyes and Feet**

#### **Tips on Preventing Foot and Eye Problems**

- Control blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol levels
- Exercise regularly
- See your family physician regularly
- Eat a good diet
- Quit smoking
- Avoid alcohol

#### **Signs of Eye Problems**

- Blurry vision for more than two days
- Sudden loss of vision in one or both eyes
- Seeing black spots, cobwebs or flashing light that are not really there

Keep eyes healthy by having a dilated eye exam at least once a year and asking the eye doctor to report the findings to your family physician.

#### **Signs of Foot Problems**

- Loss of feeling
- Sharp pain or tingling
- Sores
- Muscle weakness
- Burning feeling

#### **Keep Feet Healthy by**

- Washing feet daily in lukewarm water with a mild soap
- Patting feet completely dry
- Keeping the skin of the feet smooth with cream or a lotion that contains lanolin
- Keeping feet dry by applying non-medicated powder before putting on socks and shoes
- Checking feet every day for redness, swelling, pain, numbness or tingling
- Cutting toenails straight across
- Not getting feet too hot or too cold
- Not going barefoot

Source: [www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org)