

## *Staying Healthy with Diabetes: Soothe the Risks for Neuropathy*

Tingly feet? Walking on “pins and needles”? Foot pain or numbness? These are more than just signs of too much fun on the dance floor. They could be symptoms of neuropathy, or damaged nerves, especially in the feet.

Why do we care? Because half the people with diabetes have some form of neuropathy, according to the American Diabetes Association (ADA). And since nerves are our messengers for touch and pain and tell our muscles how to move, bodies function much better when nerves are healthy. If you have diabetes, these strategies can help prevent or delay the development of neuropathy:

**Manage those blood sugars!** Excess glucose in the blood can injure blood vessels and harm delicate nerves. When we maintain normal blood sugar levels, nerve damage is less likely to occur.

**Test blood sugars regularly.** Knowing your numbers can guide you and your health care team to optimal control of your diabetes...and better nerve function.

**Get an A1C test at least 2 times a year.** One more way to make sure your diabetes is in good control...and your nerves aren't suffering.

**Take care of your feet!** No kidding! Examine your feet regularly for signs of wear and tear. Report anything unusual to your doctor.

**Wear good shoes!** Specially-made shoes can support and protect your feet from injury. But you have to wear them! A recent study found that people with diabetic

neuropathy often failed to wear their protective shoes.

**Be careful with exercise.** Recent guidelines from the ADA state that people with peripheral neuropathy---nerve damage that causes pain or loss of feeling in the hands or feet---can participate in moderate-intensity exercise (such as walking) if they wear proper footwear and check their feet every day for any sores. Weight-bearing activities (such as dancing and walking) are not recommended for anyone with a foot injury or obvious sore.

**Toss the cigarettes.** Non-smokers have a much lower risk for neuropathy and its complications, including amputations.

**Get a medical check-up at least once a year.** And make sure it includes a foot exam and sensitivity screening. Keep those feet dancing out for diabetes!

*Barbara Quinn, MS, RD, CDE*