How Are Your Feet Feeling?

A Simple Test that Could Save Your Feet

This patient/caregiver enabler was developed by Martine Albert, RN, BScN, IIWCC, to help facilitate the use of CAWC monofilaments by patients with diabetes.

Preventing foot sores should be a major goal of people with diabetes. Sometimes people who have diabetes do not feel pain or hot and cold sensations on their feet. This is called a Loss of Protective of Sensation, or "LOPS." A loss of sensation can also be referred to as *sensory neuropathy*. This condition increases a person's risk for injury to their feet. If LOPS is found, it is essential that the patient's feet get proper attention and care.

It is important that feet be *routinely* tested to see if they have a change in sensation. A quick, easy and inexpensive test can be done using a small piece of monofilament similar to a piece of fishing line. If a person cannot feel the monofilament on one or more sites on their feet there is an increased risk of injury. The test outlined below can be done by a health-care professional or by anyone trained in the procedure and will help determine if there is a loss of protective sensation.

How to Perform Sensory Testing

Step 1

- Ask the person who will be tested to get in a comfortable position.
- Remove his or her shoes and socks.
- Explain the test and the reason for doing it.
- Show the monofilament.
- Demonstrate on their forearm how the monofilament bends and feels.
- Clarify that the filament is not sharp and is like a fishing line.

Step 2

- Explain that you will be touching the feet (one at a time) in 10 areas (see Diagram 1 for the locations).
- Make sure the feet are in a neutral position and ask the person being tested to close their eyes.
- Ask them to say "yes" when they feel the filament and, if they can, to tell you where they are feeling it.

Step 3

- Hold the monofilament at 90° degrees to the foot.
- Press it against the first site.
- Make sure there is enough pressure to bend the filament into a C curve (see Diagram 2).
- Keep the pressure in place for one to two seconds.
- Do not slide and avoid making repeated contact in one area.

Step 4

- Keep a record using a + sign for feeling or a – sign for no feeling, then add the + signs to get a score.
- Change the sequence of test sites to prevent the person from sensing a pattern.
- Do not test over callouses or corns.
- Discuss your findings with the person being tested.
- Provide education as needed.

Conclusion

The monofilament tool can be a useful screening and assessment test to identify LOPS and to help reduce the incidence of diabetic foot problems.

To order monofilaments, visit the Boutique section of the CAWC Web site at www.cawc.net.

DIAGRAM 2

DIAGRAM 1

10 Site Sensation Testing using a 5.07 gram monofilament

Right foot

Left Foot

And also on the dorsum of *each* foot.

Check for sensation at each of the following sites:

Sites 1-3: Toes: 1st ____ 3rd ____ 5th ____

Sites 4-6: Balls of foot: 1st ____ 3rd ____ 5th ____

Sites 7-10: Arch: _____ Other side of arch: ____ Heel ____ Top of foot: ____

Score _____/ 10

Tips for creating effective enablers are available in the *Wound Care Canada* section of the CAWC Web Site at www.cawc.net.