



Stand up for Your Feet

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# Neglect can Lead to Nerve Damage, Circulation Issues and Amputation

Rosemont, Ill. – April 29, 2021 – Stand up for your feet. That is the message from David Armstrong, DPM, PhD, a member of the Society for Vascular Surgery and a podiatric surgeon. While National Foot Health Awareness Month was recognized in April, the message should resonate always.

“If you ignore your feet, they could go away,” Dr. Armstrong said simply. “Unfortunately, with diabetes and vascular diseases of the feet, problems are often silent – and sinister. That’s because issues with feet and circulatory issues can develop into situations so severe as to require amputation of toes, feet and legs.”

For example, a wound could cause nerve damage and subsequently “wear a hole in the feet like you would in a sock. You might not feel it until it’s too late.”

Statistics showcase the problem. “Someone in the world develops a foot wound every 1.2 seconds. About half get infected,” he said. “A person loses a leg every 20 seconds as a result of diabetes. More people are losing legs from diabetes than land mines or IEDs (improvised explosive device) worldwide.”

Many amputations are preventable, leading to a goal to eliminate such complications within the next generation.

To keep feet healthy, Dr. Armstrong recommended people look at their feet daily or have someone do it for them. Check for ulcers or wounds, for redness, swelling or an ingrown toenail, as well as any wound bleeding into the sock. “If people would do this every day the number of cases caught early would knock your socks off,” he said, pun intended.

Some institutions and clinics have developed regular evaluation programs involving “foot selfies;” patients send in photos of their feet for doctor evaluation. Dr. Armstrong is involved in such a program at the University of Southern California, where he is a professor of surgery. “Not a week goes by when we don’t identify something and prevent hospitalization,” he said.

Keeping feet healthy can be as simple as a podiatrist trimming a patient’s callouses and assuring patients’ shoes fit

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properly and have adequate insoles. That reduces the risk of re-ulceration and the subsequent need for wound care, said Dr. Armstrong.

Patients with circulatory issues of the feet have many options and therapies to explore before the possibility of limb loss. These include the use of statins or anti-clotting drugs and/or participating in a supervised exercise program. Anti-clotting drugs, in particular, can have a dramatic impact on reducing risk for amputation, he said. Gene therapy holds promise for the future.

“It all starts with the patients themselves,” said Dr. Armstrong. “They should monitor their feet, and check with their doctors for any problems. Keep your appointment, keep your feet,” he said.

### **About the Society for Vascular Surgery**

*The Society for Vascular Surgery is the leading not-for-profit, professional medical society on establishing causes and treatments for vascular disease. SVS seeks to advance excellence and innovation in vascular health through education, advocacy, research and public awareness and is composed of specialty-trained vascular surgeons who are dedicated to providing comprehensive care for vascular disease. For more information visit [www.vascular.org](http://www.vascular.org). Follow the SVS on Facebook @VascularHealth, Twitter @VascularSVS and Instagram @societyforvascularsurgery.*

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