



Objective

Explain how the monofilament detects nerve damage.

Overview

Damage to the nerves in the feet is common in people with diabetes. This damage could cause loss of feeling. Injuries then are less likely to be felt. There is also an increased risk for infection. Small problems such as a blister, a wrinkle in a sock, or a pebble in a shoe, can cause big problems if there is no feeling. This is why you should check your feet everyday.

How do you know if you have nerve damage?

Your health care provider will use a monofilament to check your feet for nerve damage. This is a 1½ inch piece of nylon, much like a piece of fishing line. It is attached to a plastic handle. With your eyes closed, the doctor presses the filament against many areas on the bottom of your feet. Each time you feel the touch, you let the doctor know. The amount of pressure it takes to feel the monofilament is the least amount of pressure needed to feel an injury. If you feel the pressure, chances are good that you would also feel a foot injury before it starts.

Important things to remember

Ask your doctor to check your feet. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) suggests that health care providers use a monofilament to check for nerve damage at least yearly.¹ Look at your feet every day for signs of redness, blisters, cracks, cuts, etc. Report any numbness, tingling, burning or pain to your doctor.

How can your doctor help you?

Your doctor should do a complete foot check every year. At each doctor's visit, remove your shoes. He/she can check for any injury, pressure, ingrown toenails, etc. He/she can refer you to a podiatrist (foot specialist). If needed, the podiatrist will order special shoes. These shoes help to prevent further injury or treat any problems that have occurred. A podiatrist needs to be part of your health care team.

Quiz

1. A monofilament is used to detect _____ damage.
 - a) Nerve
 - b) Kidney
 - c) Heart
 - d) Eye
2. True or False: If you can feel the monofilament, chances are good that you would also feel an injury to your foot.
3. The ADA suggests that you have your feet checked with a monofilament at least _____.

Answers: 1) a, 2) True, 3) yearly

1. The American Diabetes Association. Diabetes Care, Volume 31, Supplement 1 January 2008. S32.