

Media Release

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NEW TEST FOR DIABETIC FOOT ULCERS MAY PREVENT AMPUTATION

Bosch scientist, Dr Susan McLennan and colleagues have developed a new non-invasive test that analyses the fluid in diabetic foot ulcers. She has shown that high levels of a particular enzyme in this fluid link with slow healing time.

If a person with diabetes has developed a foot ulcer, early intervention may prevent complications that could lead to amputation of the toe or even the foot. Ulcer treatment includes podiatry and early antibiotic therapy, although this approach does not always provide the complete answer.

The incidence of diabetes is predicted to increase in the next twenty years and currently in Australia there are 1.5million sufferers. 50% of these people don't know they have diabetes, and 15% will develop diabetic foot ulcers. Currently 3500 amputations result from diabetic foot ulcers in Australia per year.

"We were intrigued as to why diabetic foot ulcers often fail to heal in some patients. We had already established infection can delay healing but this did not explain slow healing when there wasn't any infection," said Dr McLennan.

"This lead to us looking at more than 50 patients with foot ulcers and taking samples of the wound fluid. In those who had high initial levels of the particular enzyme, MMP-9, the healing was delayed for more than 12 weeks.

"One of the frustrations for doctors treating diabetic foot ulcers is that there is not a simple test that can predict wound healing time. This is important because the longer the time a wound takes to heal the greater the risk for amputation. Although more studies are required to verify and extend the findings, this simple non-invasive test may help to provide the solution," concluded Dr McLennan.

All people with diabetes should have an annual foot check with their doctor or podiatrist and feet with nerve damage, corns, calluses, claw toes or poor circulation are more susceptible to ulcer development.

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