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Test helps diabetics detect nerve trouble

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - The indicator plaster neuropad, or IPN, is a new test that can help diabetic patients identify nerve damage brought on by diabetes, clinicians report in the journal *Diabetes Care*.

"The IPN can be performed by the patient at home in 10 minutes, and the result can be offered to the doctor in the next visit," Dr. Nicholas Tentolouris from Athens University Medical School in Greece told Reuters Health.

"The test offers the opportunity to the patients to participate actively in the prevention of the devastating complications related to diabetic foot problems," he added.

The IPN turns a pink color when nerve conduction is normal and a blue color when nerve damage is present.

In a study involving 156 diabetic patients and their health care providers, the in-home IPN test proved reliable and accurate for the diagnosis of diabetic nerve damage, also called peripheral neuropathy, which can cause numbness, pain, and tingling sensations in the feet.

Patients and health care providers agreed in 90.3 percent of the cases, deciding that the IPN results were normal or abnormal.

Patients consistently rated the IPN test instructions as easy to understand, easy to use, and easy to evaluate. About one fifth of the patients said they needed help performing the test.

"The results of the tests agree with those obtained by more complex tests used for the diagnosis of the diabetic neuropathy," Tentolouris said.

Currently there is no treatment for diabetic peripheral neuropathy, "and prevention of this complication with good metabolic control is the only available option," Tentolouris explained. "Therefore, patients with an abnormal IPN test -- that is patients with peripheral neuropathy -- will be educated for the care of their feet, they will be instructed to use proper footwear, and they will have their feet examined by the health care professionals more often."

Tentolouris and colleagues recommend that patients with diabetes use the IPN once per year for the detection of peripheral neuropathy.

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