

Teaching Preventive Steps Keeps Patients Walking

LiPAK Students Recognize Foot Health Importance

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Released: August 2010

Struggling to keep her blood sugar at a reasonable level, Kelly Thomas* searched for ways to improve her health. Her answer came by way of mail, a flyer for the Limb Preservation After Katrina (LiPAK) diabetes training class.

“I’ve had diabetes for the last 15 years, and for the most part I’ve done a pretty good job of maintaining a decent blood sugar level. Lately though, my sugar level had been up in the 200s, and I really wasn’t sure why or what that was doing to my body,” Thomas said.

Thomas decided to attend the LiPAK class, her first diabetes education class since she was diagnosed.

“The instructors (eQHealth Solutions Quality Improvement Specialists Holly Ries and Jane Bergeron) used real life examples and spoke in a way we could all understand,” she said.

By attending the class, Thomas said she learned how to eat properly and what happens to each of her organs if she doesn’t. She also learned how to properly check the bottoms of her feet daily for negative spots that might signal nerve damage, a skill she put to the test just a few months later.

On a Sunday morning like most others, Thomas dressed for church. Instead of wearing her specially-made diabetic shoes, she opted for her “Sunday shoes,” a risky decision for a Medicare beneficiary with diabetes.

Once Thomas arrived at church, she felt a pain under her big toe of her left foot. “Oh my God, oh my God,” Thomas thought, “I wore the wrong shoes; I have to hurry home and put on my diabetic shoes.”

After church, Thomas returned home and tested skin sensitivity on the bottom of her feet using a hand-held mirror and the monofilament provided at the LiPAK class. The sensitivity self-screening process for identifying nerve damage that could lead to foot ulcers is unique to the LiPAK class training curriculum. Although Thomas’s self-screening showed no damage, she was still concerned.

“All I could think about was the video I saw in the class,” she said. “The part about tight-fitting shoes causing foot ulcers and eventually amputations had me scared.”

Even though my Thomas’s regular doctor found no damage, she wanted to put her worries at ease so she went to the podiatrist.

“He put my feet through a few different tests, and I think he was kind of surprised how well I responded to them,” Thomas said.

Although the podiatrist's exam confirmed Thomas's self-screening results, he still used the visit as an opportunity to reinforce lessons that Thomas had heard before in the LiPAK class: always wear the recommended diabetic shoes and eliminate starchy foods.

Since attending the class, Thomas said she has been wearing her diabetic shoes and testing her feet regularly. Also, she has put more emphasis on improving her diet.

"Now that I know the good foods and the bad foods, I've been eating a lot healthier," she said. "I make it a point to eat a lot of vegetables, egg beaters and grilled chicken. I'm so glad I attended the class; the instructors really cared about us and wanted us to know we can still live a happy life with diabetes."

*Not her real name

This material was produced by eQHealth Solutions (formerly Louisiana Health Care Review), the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for Louisiana, under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The contents presented do not necessarily reflect CMS policy. LA9SoW6F110-2255