

John Bowis founded the EU Diabetes Working Group when he was a Member of the European Parliament © European Union

Diabetes – check your feet

Doctors should routinely test people's feet to check for diabetes, that's according to a former UK Health Minister and MEP who has become a campaigner for the disease after being diagnosed with it himself.

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Tingly feet can be a sign of diabetes, helping provide doctors with a crucial early diagnosis.

'You have symptoms like tingling in the feet,' said John Bowis, who was diagnosed with diabetes in 2002 but thinks he may well have had the disease for longer.

Diabetes can impair the function of nerves in the extremities of the body, leading to tingling and numbness in the feet and legs.

'At night, the sheets can actually hurt. Then I developed lymphoedema, a swelling that wouldn't go away. So, I tested my blood sugar,' said Bowis, a former MEP who set up a committee in the European Parliament soon after he was diagnosed with diabetes to campaign for screening, education, prevention and research.

Diabetes affects about one in 20 Europeans, and the number of sufferers in Europe is forecast to increase by over a fifth in the next 20 years as people continue to eat unhealthy food and as obesity rates rise.

However, early diagnosis of the most common type, Type-2 diabetes, can prevent or slow its progression.

Doctors regularly check blood sugar levels and eyesight for signs of diabetes, but rarely check foot problems – which can often be an indicator of the illness – because the cost of testing is rarely covered by health insurance.

'Podiatry is an expense usually handled by the individual,' said Bowis. 'A lot more research is needed on the diabetic foot.'

EU Diabetes Working Group (EUDWG)

- A group of MEPs who share an interest in diabetes.
- Set up in 2002 by John Bowis, a former UK Health Minister, MEP and diabetes sufferer.
- Re-launched in 2009 with policy objectives outlined for 2009-14.
- The Working Group aims to gain recognition for diabetes as an EU public health priority, and to secure more support for research.

On World Diabetes Day in 2008, Bowis invited three diabetic athletes who had won gold medals at the Beijing Olympics that year – Polish oarsman Michal Jelinski, Dutch basketball player Bas van de Goor, and French swimmer Paul-Louis Fouesnant – to speak at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France to help raise awareness of the disease.

In March 2012, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution to address the EU diabetes epidemic. It called for the establishment of an EU diabetes strategy focused on prevention and early diagnosis.

Today, some EU Member States have already adopted national diabetes programmes.

More info

[EU Diabetes Working Group \(EUDWG\)](#)

[European Coalition for Diabetes](#)