

DIABETIC FOOT ULCERS

Foot ulcers are a significant complication of diabetes mellitus and often precede lower-extremity amputation. The most frequent underlying etiologies are nerve damage (neuropathy), trauma, deformity, high plantar pressures, and peripheral arterial disease. Neuropathy causes loss of feeling in your feet, taking away your ability to feel pain and discomfort, so you may not detect an injury or irritation. Poor circulation in your feet reduces your ability to heal, making it hard for even a tiny cut to resist infection. The result of these complications may result in the formation of a foot ulcer.



Diabetic Foot Ulcer

Approximately 15 to 20 percent of the estimated 120, 000 persons in Alberta with diabetes mellitus will be hospitalized with a foot complication at some time during the course of their disease. Unfortunately, many of these patients will require amputation within the foot or above the ankle as a consequence of severe infection or peripheral ischemia. Neuropathy is often a predisposing factor to ulceration and amputation.

Treatment

The primary goal in the treatment of diabetic foot ulcers is to obtain wound closure. Management of the foot ulcer is largely determined by its severity.

- A mainstay of ulcer therapy is debridement of all necrotic, callus, and fibrous tissue. Unhealthy tissue must be removed back to bleeding tissue to allow full visualization of the extent of the ulcer and detect underlying infection.
- Rest, elevation of the affected foot, and relief of pressure are essential components of treatment and should be initiated at first presentation.
- Treatment of Infection. If the wound is infected, antibiotics are used to treat the infection so that healing may occur.
- If the circulation is poor, an evaluation by a vascular surgeon is imperative to determine if intervention is required to increase blood flow to the foot so the ulcer can heal.
- Hyperbaric oxygen therapy may be considered in wounds that have not responded to conventional treatment.

The Role of the Podiatric Surgeon

A major goal of the podiatric surgeon is to prevent amputation. There are many new surgical techniques available to save feet and legs, including joint reconstruction and wound healing technologies. Getting regular foot checkups and seeking immediate help when you notice something can keep small problems from worsening. Your foot and ankle surgeon works together with other health care providers to prevent and treat complications from diabetes.