

Diabetes and amputations

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Most people are aware that type 2 diabetes is increasing at an alarming rate and is now in epidemic proportions. Over 7% of Australian adults have diabetes.

Diabetes is now the most common reason for lower limb amputations in Australia. With the development of specialised high risk foot services, the rate of amputations from diabetes is decreasing.

Foot problems are common in people with diabetes with over 20% of people with diabetes experiencing an ulcer. The scary part is that ulcers are often the start of a problem that can lead to an amputation!

The cause of amputations in people with diabetes is complex, it results from multiple issues in the feet. These include: loss of sensation in the feet from nerve damage - so people are not aware of any damage that has occurred; poor circulation in the feet from the effects of diabetes on the arteries and small blood vessels; decreased healing ability and increased risk of infections and from damage due to poor fitting shoes or abnormally shaped feet or toes.

When a person with diabetes has had an amputation the risk of further amputations in the affected foot or in the other foot is very high. The risk extends beyond the feet and people with an amputation are at high risk of other diabetes complications as well.

This is why team care for people with diabetes after an amputation is essential.

After the initial rehabilitation, healing, orthotics, physio and education to return to health after the amputation, then comes the longer term care of the person and gaining excellent control of their diabetes and of course the regular checks on your other foot and the area that has been amputated.

The rehabilitation is essential to get people mobile safely again. Being mobile and active is essential to gain control of your diabetes and improve your mood and independence. Depression is very commonly associated with diabetes and common after amputations. It is important to get back to your friends and family. If you do feel down or depressed it is important to discuss this with your doctor – there is treatment available to make you feel better.

It is extremely important that you are involved in checking your foot and legs every day and report anything out of the ordinary. The earlier any problems are detected, the easier it is to prevent any further problems. You will get to know your podiatrist very well, but this is good and important for your ongoing health.

The team: after an amputation, around you there should be a team that includes your family doctor, your diabetes educator, your podiatrist, your physiotherapist, many specialists, your pharmacist. The team may grow to include a dietitian, a psychologist, an occupational therapist it can seem overwhelming at times.

Each member of the team is a specialist in their own area and has specific skills to help you. Do not be afraid to ask them questions and if they offer help accept it because in the end it will help you.

So what needs to be checked? Everything! Your eyes, kidneys, heart, arteries, how well controlled your diabetes is, your blood pressure, the medication that you are taking. It is by gaining the best control of your diabetes that further complications can be avoided.

Managing diabetes can be quite complex but if systems are put in place, people know what to do and can have access to care when they need it, many complications can be prevented.

Diabetes Australia Member Organisations

Diabetes ACT

www.diabetes-act.com.au

Phone: (02) 6288 9830

Diabetes Australia NSW

www.diabetesnsw.com.au

Phone: 1300 136 588

Healthy Living NT

www.healthylivingnt.org.au

Phone: 08 8927 8488

Diabetes Australia QLD

www.diabetesqld.org.au

Phone: 1300 136 588

Diabetes SA

www.diabetessa.com.au

Phone : 1300 136 588

Diabetes Tasmania

www.datas.org.au

Phone: 1300 136 588

Diabetes Australia VIC

www.diabetesvic.org.au

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Diabetes WA

www.diabeteswa.com.au

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