

DIABETES WOES GROWING: [SPORTS FINAL Edition]
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Complications from diabetes continue to cause serious medical problems for many people. Amputation, or loss of a limb, is one of the more serious problems associated with diabetic conditions. Fortunately, advances in prosthetic treatments have helped amputees, whose numbers seem to be growing in the diabetic population.

"More than 60% of the prosthetic patients I see are diabetics," reports Vincent Benenati, a certified orthotist and president of East Coast Orthotic & Prosthetic Corporation in Mineola, L.I. "What is especially alarming is the increasing number of amputees who are relatively young - in their 40s and 50s - instead of the elderly population."

It is not uncommon for a diabetic to develop neuropathy, the loss of feeling and sensation in limbs, especially in toes, feet and legs. This is the result of poor blood circulation to that portion of the body.

In particular when a person becomes elderly, many times they lack the ability to properly take care of their feet and toes. Living alone or on a fixed income, it becomes increasingly difficult to purchase creams and treatments that could be helpful in keeping the skin on the feet healthy.

It is very easy for blisters, corns or calluses to form from ill-fitting shoes. The healing process for a diabetic is often longer than for a nondiabetic. For example, the skin on a callus can dry and crack, and provide a major breeding source of bacteria and infection. A diabetic ulcer requires careful attention by a health care professional.

To prevent against gangrene a doctor may advise amputating toes, or perhaps part of the foot. In certain cases, to reduce the risk of piecemeal amputation (which becomes continually painful and stressful for the patient), the doctor may advise taking off the entire foot, the ankle, and a small portion of the lower leg in one procedure. "It gives the diabetic a decent opportunity to have a relatively good quality of life through using a prosthetic device," says Benenati.

"When compared to even four or five years ago, there have been vast improvements and advances in the development of prosthetics. It is an emotional shock for just about anyone who loses a limb. But today, this does not mean that life is over for the diabetic patient," says Benenati.

"Through computer design technology, the fitting of a prosthetic device is very accurate," he adds. "Most important of all, the performance and function that the patient sees with prosthetics can be excellent. Diabetic amputees who wear prosthetics can enjoy a wide range of movement including many physical activities and sports."

"Also, wearers of prosthetics will find that the cosmetic, esthetic appearance is much more superior to the previous generation of products."

There is an alarming rise in the number of diabetics. And there are millions of Americans who have not been properly tested and are unaware they have the condition. So it is important to identify diabetes through testing and screening. And if you are a diabetic, see your podiatrist regularly and be aware of any changes on your feet such as blisters and ulcerations.

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