



Dr. Valinda Allen shares information about diabetic wound issues

by Valinda Allen, MD

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ALTON, IL – An estimated 29.1 million people (9.3 percent of the population) have diabetes, and nearly 28 percent are undiagnosed. In addition, about 86 million U.S. adults have pre-diabetes and more than 77 million of them are unaware.

Age, diet, activity level, obesity and heredity are all risk factors for diabetes. People with diabetes can also experience co-existing conditions such as stroke, blindness, heart disease, kidney failure and lower limb amputation.

In 2010, nearly 73,000 adults aged 20 years or older with diagnosed diabetes received non-traumatic lower limb amputations. This accounts for 60 percent of non-traumatic lower limb amputations. Even more alarmingly, people with an amputation have a 50 percent mortality rate within five years. Diabetes-related amputations may result from chronic wounds caused by diabetes, especially diabetic foot ulcers. It is estimated that 25 percent of people living with diabetes will develop a diabetic foot ulcer.

There are several common factors of diabetic foot ulcers including neuropathy, peripheral arterial disease (PAD), deformities and Charcot foot. Neuropathy is a result of damage to peripheral nerves and often causes weakness, numbness and pain in hands and feet. Similarly, PAD is caused by narrowed arteries which reduces blood flow to the limbs. Charcot foot is a deformity that results from nerve damage in the foot or ankle, potentially causing injuries to go untreated and leading to the breakdown of joints.

The Alton Memorial Hospital Wound Care & Hyperbaric Medicine Center recommends the following to help prevent diabetic foot ulcers:

- Stop smoking immediately;
- Comprehensive foot examinations each time you visit your health care provider (at least four times a year);
- Daily self-inspections of the feet, or have a family member perform the inspection;
- Regular care of the feet including cleaning toenails and taking care of corns and calluses;
- Choose supportive, proper footwear (shoes and socks);
- Take steps to improve circulation such as eating healthier and exercising on a regular basis.

Proper wound care techniques are imperative to healing diabetic foot ulcers. debridement, offloading or total contact casts, negative pressure wound therapy and hyperbaric oxygen therapy are a few of the leading treatments offered at our Wound Care Center.

Debridement, the removal of damaged tissue, is widely recognized as one of the most important methods of advanced wound care.

Relieving pressure from the wound, also known as off-loading total contact casting, is the gold standard for the treatment of diabetic foot ulcers.

Finally, hyperbaric oxygen therapy is when a patient receives 100 percent oxygen and an increased atmospheric pressure inside an acrylic chamber.

These specialized wound care therapies can aid in wound closure, new tissue growth, wound tissue regeneration and much more.

For more information about diabetic foot ulcers or how you may be able to help avoid amputation, contact the Alton Memorial Hospital Wound Care & Hyperbaric Medicine Center at 618-433-7066.