



HEALTH AWARENESS

Rare Diabetes Complication Becoming More Common

(NAPSA)—As diabetes rates soar nationwide, foot and ankle surgeons say more patients are developing a rare complication.

The condition is called Charcot foot (pronounced SHAR-co). It involves a sudden softening of the foot's bones. This can trigger an avalanche of problems, including joint loss, fractures, collapse of the arch, massive deformity, ulcers, amputation and even death.

"As the foot's structure collapses, the bottom of the foot can become convex, bulging like the hull of a ship," says Keith Jacobson, DPM, FACFAS, a Houston foot and ankle surgeon. "Since most people with Charcot cannot feel pain in their lower extremities, they continue walking on the foot, causing further injury."

Jacobson says every person with diabetes should know the Charcot foot warning signs: a red, hot, swollen foot or ankle. Because other dangerous conditions, such as deep vein thrombosis and acute infections, have the same symptoms, a red, hot, swollen foot or ankle requires emergency medical care.

The American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons (ACFAS) estimates that less than 1 percent of people with diabetes develop Charcot foot. Nearly 21 million Americans have diabetes.

Charcot foot cannot be reversed, but its dangerous effects



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can be stopped if the condition is detected early.

Consider the case of Kim Schraeder, a mother of four who learned that she had diabetes at age 47. A year later, she was diagnosed with Charcot foot and her foot and ankle surgeon performed reconstructive surgery. Recovery took months. But today she can walk on both feet, and self foot inspections are part of her daily routine.

People with diabetes play a crucial role in preventing Charcot foot and its complications. Diabetes patients should keep blood sugar levels under control. This has been shown to reduce the progression of nerve damage in the feet. People with diabetes should also inspect both of their feet every day, and get regular checkups from a foot and ankle surgeon.

For more information on Charcot foot and other diabetic foot conditions, or to locate a foot and ankle surgeon, visit the ACFAS consumer Web site, FootPhysicians.com.