Diabetic heel ulcers: a major risk factor for lower extremity amputation.

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Abstract

Of all the ulcers seen in patients with diabetes, heel ulcers are the most serious and often lead to below-the-knee amputation. Management of heel ulcers requires a thorough knowledge of the major risk factors for ulceration in the heel area and a standardized program of local ulcer care, metabolic control, early control of infection, and improvement of blood supply to the foot. The most common risk factors for ulceration in the heel region include immobility of the lower limbs, diabetic neuropathy, structural deformity, and peripheral arterial occlusive disease. Patient education regarding foot hygiene, skin care, and proper footwear is crucial to reducing the risk of an injury that can lead to heel ulceration. A careful foot examination that tests for neuropathy and arterial insufficiency can identify patients at risk for heel ulcers and appropriately classify patients with ulcers into different grades to design proper therapeutic plans for management. Team management programs that focus on education, prevention, regular foot examinations, aggressive intervention, and proper use of therapeutic measures can significantly reduce the risk of lower-extremity amputations from heel ulcers.