

Patient information

Charcot Foot

Diabetes and Podiatry Departments

Diabetes is a lifelong condition which can cause foot problems. Some of these problems can happen because the nerves and blood vessels supplying your feet are damaged.

When the nerves are damaged it is called '**peripheral neuropathy**' and can affect the feeling in your feet.

When the blood vessels supplying your feet are damaged it is called '**peripheral arterial disease**' or '**ischaemia**' and can affect the circulation in your feet.

These changes may be very gradual and you may not notice them. That is why it is important that every year you have your feet screened (checked) by a suitably trained professional or assessed by a podiatrist. You can then agree on a treatment plan to suit your needs.

Charcot Foot (Charcot Arthropathy)

Charcot foot is an important complication that can occur if you have peripheral neuropathy in your feet. Charcot foot can make the bones of your foot become fragile, which means they may break or dislocate easily, even if you don't injure them. Most patients cannot recall injuring their foot at all.

If you have peripheral neuropathy in your feet, you may still be able to walk on your foot without feeling any pain. If this happens, your foot can become seriously deformed. The shape of your foot will not return to normal and this can make it very difficult to find shoes that fit.

Note: Any change to the shape of the foot increases the risk of foot ulcers.

Charcot foot with or without ulcers is a very serious complication as it is linked to an increased risk of heart attacks, strokes, amputations of the foot or leg and early death.

Controlling your diabetes, cholesterol and blood pressure, stopping smoking, increasing cardiovascular exercise and controlling your weight helps to reduce the risk of these life- and limb-threatening problems.

People with Charcot foot will need to ask their Diabetes Team about non-weight-bearing cardiovascular exercise, so as not to risk further harm to the damaged foot.

Note: You may be at further risk of cardiovascular problems if you have a family history of heart disease.

How will I know if I've got Charcot foot?

The early signs of Charcot foot are swelling and warmth in the affected area of the foot or ankle. There may be some redness, which is sometimes mistaken for infection.

Usually there is no pain (because of nerve damage), but this is not always the case. In most cases only one foot is affected. However, in some rare cases people can develop Charcot foot in both feet, although not necessarily at the same time.

Your foot may become deformed if you do not get appropriate treatment early enough and you continue to walk on it.

It is important that you notice any problem early and get professional help

If you develop any of the following problems:

- A red, hot, swollen toe or foot.
- A new break or wound in the skin.
- New redness or discolouration of your toe or foot.
- New or unexplained pain in your foot.

It is important that you contact your Multi-disciplinary Foot Care Team, local Podiatry Department or GP for advice as soon as possible (within 24 hours).

If you discover any breaks in the skin or blisters, cover them with a sterile dressing. Do not burst blisters.

If your Multi-disciplinary Foot Care Team, local Podiatry Department or GP are not available, and there is no sign of your foot healing within 24 hours, go to your local accident and emergency department and take this leaflet with you.

Who will treat my foot?

Ideally, your foot should be managed by a specialist diabetes foot team. This may be made up of a variety of healthcare professionals or an individual with experience in treating this condition.

Charcot foot can be a very serious condition and can be difficult to diagnose, treat and manage, so it is very important that it is treated and managed by experienced healthcare professionals.

What is the aim of my treatment?

There are three important aims of treating Charcot foot

- To prevent a permanent change to the shape of your foot
- Preventing future foot problems
- Reducing the risks to your limbs and life.

What will the treatment consist of?

The only effective treatment is to reduce the weight on the foot or affected joint and prevent it from moving.

This will need to be done with some form of cast (in the same way as if you had a broken bone). The treatment you receive will depend on the method of treatment that your local specialist diabetes foot team prefers.

Treatment options

- A plaster cast (this is the gold standard treatment) that your healthcare professional will regularly review and change when needed.
- A cast walker with a prescription insole that your healthcare professional will regularly review may be used.

Both of these methods of treating Charcot foot have been proven to be successful, but you will need to closely follow the advice you are given.

What other treatment will I receive?

You will need regular appointments with a member of the specialist diabetes foot team to check the temperature of your foot.

You will have an x-ray when needed and you may need prescription footwear supplied by an orthotist.

How can I help my condition?

You should follow the medical advice you are given. You will need to keep your weight off your foot as much as possible, as Charcot foot can be very disabling if it is not treated appropriately.

The following advice will help you to manage your condition.

- Keep your diabetes under control by following the advice you have been given in the past.
- Keep checking your other foot as there will be more pressure on it and this could cause a further problem.
- Contact a member of the specialist diabetes service if you notice any change or are worried about your treatment in any way.

When your condition has settled down

Even with the appropriate treatment, there may be some changes in the shape of your foot. You will need to have regular check-ups with a podiatrist and possibly an orthotist if you need prescription footwear.

Remember

If you discover any problems with your feet contact your podiatry department or GP immediately. If they are not available, go to your nearest accident and emergency department. Remember any delay in getting advice or treatment when you have a problem can lead to more serious problems.

Diabetes Foot Team

Aintree Hospital Site

Tel: 0151 529 4646 Text phone Number: 18001 0151 529 4646

Royal Liverpool Hospital Site

Tel: 0151 706 3062 Text phone number: 18001 0151 706 3062

Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

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Tel: 0151 529 4646

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Royal Liverpool Hospital Site

0151 706 3062

Text phone number: 18001 0151 706 3062

www.diabetes.org.uk Diabetes UK

www.nice.org.uk/CG10

Type 2 diabetes: prevention and management of foot problems. NICE clinical guideline 10 (2004)

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