

SURGICAL OFF-LOADING HEALS DIABETIC WOUNDS

H. David Gottlieb, DPM, DABPM, FAPWCA

Surgical Offloading Really **Does** Heal Diabetic Ulcers

The power of surgical offloading to heal chronic diabetic ulcers is quite strong yet underused. Used appropriately this technique can greatly shorten the course of treatment and restore patients to their desired level of activity quickly.

Surgical offloading is the judicious use of surgery to remove and /or correct physical deformities which have contributed to ulcer formation. Presented here is a non-healing diabetic foot ulcer which fully resolved shortly after surgical intervention.

Conclusion: Surgical offloading of the diabetic foot is a valuable tool in healing ulcers.

CASE: Mr. N was a 68yo male patient with Type II diabetes. He presented in August, 2012 with an ulcer on the plantar-medial aspect of the interphalangeal joint great toe left. He had good vascular flow. Surgery to remove the offending hyperostosis was proposed many times during the course of conservative treatment. Patient refused every time because he was convinced he would ultimately lose his toe then foot based on stories he had heard 'from others'. Treatments used included offloading, debridement, antibiotics when appropriate, amniotic fluid infiltrations, and various topical dressings.

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The patient finally became tired of repeated trips to clinic. He opted for surgical intervention. The decision for surgery was made 3 years from first presentation and many thousands of dollars of intervention to keep him from developing osteomyelitis.

Exostectomy at the interphalangeal joint was performed on October 8th, 2015 through a dorsal approach. It had been decided best to leave the ulcerated tissues alone in this case. Patient's ulcer healed 4 weeks after surgery with no recurrence.

DISCUSSION: Many surgeons are nervous about operating at or near ulcerated tissues. Seeding of infection to previously pristine tissues, failure of compromised tissue to retain sutures, fear of ischemic changes, all of these and more deter surgical management of ulcers. However, as this case demonstrates, judicious pre-surgical evaluation can help ameliorate post-operative complications and results in quick, efficient healing. This saves time as well as reducing the expense of treatment.

TAKE HOME MESSAGE: Surgical Off-Loading is a valuable but some what overlooked technique that should be used more often.

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H. David Gottlieb, DPM DABPM, FAPWCA
Lower Extremity Limb Preservationist VAMHCS
Consultant to Acclity, Inc., BioRegen, Inc.