



Diabetes  
New Zealand

# Colin Lord: Getting early treatment is the right step

For Colin Lord, a delay in seeking medical treatment for a foot ulcer resulted in long-term health complications and extensive costs. He makes it clear that seeking early treatment is an essential step to preventing and managing foot problems.

Colin was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes in 1988 when he lived in Otematata near Benmore Dam. 'I had a medical examination for insurance purposes and that's when my diabetes was diagnosed. We had a series of locums in Otematata and it was very hard to get good consistent medical advice then. I now manage my diabetes with metformin and insulin.'

Now 69 years old and living in Timaru, Colin is President of Diabetes South Canterbury after being Secretary for seven years, and is also Chairman of the Local Diabetes Team. Recently Diabetes South Canterbury received a donation from the Tuberculosis Society in Timaru when it was wound up, allowing the diabetes society to buy a vehicle for their field officer.

Colin had had a charcot foot (*see box*) for four years when he developed an ulcer in August 2004. 'I noticed the ulcer but didn't go to the doctor for fourteen days as I had my heart set on going to a Regional Meeting for Diabetes New Zealand. I was admitted to Timaru Hospital and had the ulcer removed from my right foot. After ten days I was discharged with a vacuum pump on my foot to help the wound to heal.'

**Charcot foot**, referred to as neuropathic arthropathy, is a result of loss of feeling caused by diabetes. Following an injury, because there is often no pain, an affected person may continue to walk causing further damage, instead of resting an injured foot or seeking medical help. Early symptoms appear like an infection, with the foot becoming swollen, red, and warm. A seriously affected foot can become



Charcot foot on the right foot with neuropathy and foot ulcers

deformed. The bones may crack, splinter, and erode, and the joints may shift, change shape and become unstable. Early treatment aids healing.

After a further fourteen days, Colin's healthcare team realised there was something else wrong.

He had a scan at Christchurch hospital which found an infection in the bone of his foot. 'My foot was operated on again and then I had to go back to Christchurch every fortnight for treatment. In November 2004, they thought I would be better off in a cast rather than using a pump, and I had that cast on until January this year.'

Regular treatment with local podiatrists and district health nurses followed. In August, a piece of bone that was too close to the skin in Colin's foot was removed, as it may have caused another ulcer. 'It's very slow healing and I'm now wearing a moon boot for protection.'

The ulcer has had both social and financial costs. 'My wife, Nora, is doing all of our gardening and lawns with assistance from our family. Every time I had my dressing and filter changed when I had the vacuum pump on my foot cost the health service \$160, on average three times a week. I also had a Paragon pump to push antibiotics into my system 24 hours a day. I found it frustrating and embarrassing having to carry both pumps.'

After experiencing the severe consequences of delaying medical treatment, Colin has a strong recommendation for people with diabetes. 'Check your feet at least twice a week, if not every day. If you notice anything untoward, go to your doctor straight away.'



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