

# health & wellness

## Saving Legs With Newer, More Flexible Stents

By Mason Weiss, M.D., F.A.C.C.

Patients with painful, gangrenous peripheral artery disease commonly faced the real possibility of amputation. Now, a new generation of smaller, more flexible stents appears to be able to save the legs of these suffering individuals. Stents are tiny stainless-steel mesh coils that prop open endangered blood vessels in the leg.

Peripheral arterial disease (PAD) in the legs initially presents with symptoms of pain and cramping in the calf or thigh with activity. The disorder is seen in over 50 percent of people greater than 70 years of age. The disease can progress to skin ulcers and eventual gangrene as the blockages in the leg arteries progress. Up until now, these patients had few good options to choose from for treatment.

Historically, attempts to open these clogged leg arteries with balloon angioplasty and/or stenting techniques had not met with much success. Researchers from the University of Rochester in New York have recently reported that they have used newer, smaller and more flexible stents below the knee in an attempt to salvage the limb from amputation. They saved 43 of 57 limbs that were headed for certain amputation.

Centinela-Freeman Medical Center is participating in a national trial called the "Relax Study" in an attempt to corroborate these findings. By sparing the patient from a life-altering amputation, this non-surgical treatment offers new hope where previously there was none.

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## Diabetes and Women

By Douglas W. Laube, MD, MEd,  
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There are nearly 21 million Americans living with diabetes. That's roughly 7% of the population, and about one-third have not yet been diagnosed. Additionally, there are an estimated 54 million prediabetics. Diabetes has become a reality for an increasing number of Americans, but many still don't know the facts about the disease.

Diabetes is caused when insulin, a hormone that helps glucose from digested food nourish cells in the body, is in short supply or is not functioning properly. The unused glucose builds up in the blood stream to abnormal levels. Diabetes is diagnosed when screening tests show blood glucose to be higher than normal.

Diabetes falls into three main categories: Type 1 (juvenile-onset) diabetes develops when the body's immune system destroys the cells in the pancreas that make insulin. Type 1 diabetics take insulin shots to control blood glucose levels.

Type 2 (adult-onset) diabetes accounts for 90% to 95% of diagnosed cases of diabetes. It usually begins when the body becomes resistant to the effects of insulin. The pancreas must produce more insulin to keep glucose levels normal, but eventually the demand for insulin becomes too great and diabetes develops. Type 2 diabetes can be managed with insulin shots or medications that lower blood glucose levels, or through diet and exercise, which can reduce or eliminate the need for additional medication.

Gestational diabetes, in which the hormones of the placenta limit the effectiveness of insulin, occurs in 2% to 5% of pregnant women. This form of diabetes usually subsides after delivery.

Symptoms of diabetes can include increased thirst or urination, constant hunger, blurred vision, extreme fatigue, recurrent infections, and sores that are slow to heal. Uncontrolled diabetes can lead to severe liver damage, nerve and blood vessel damage, blindness, amputation, birth defects or stillbirth, and thyroid problems. Women can lower their risk of developing diabetes by reaching and maintaining a healthy weight, eating a diet of healthy and low-fat foods, getting regular exercise, and avoiding smoking.

ACOG recommends that women over 45 should be tested for diabetes every three years. Earlier or more frequent testing may be needed if additional risk factors are present, such as being overweight, physical inactivity, a family history of diabetes, high blood pressure, low HDL ("good") cholesterol levels, high triglyceride levels, previous abnormal glucose screening results, or a history of gestational diabetes or giving birth to a baby weighing more than nine pounds.

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