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DIABETIC STRUGGLES WITH BROKEN FOOT

Connie Midey, The Arizona Republic

Name: Joanne Elsmere.

Age: 57.

Hometown: Mesa.

Job: Retired telephone operator.

The issue: Elsmere, who has had diabetes for nine years, thought she had a bone spur. When the pain finally became so excruciating she couldn't put weight on her left foot, she consulted with podiatrist Brett Roeder of Phoenix, who told her she had broken it, the result of Charcot's joint, or neuropathic arthropathy.

Charcot's occurs when nerve problems -- diabetes-related in Elsmere's case -- cause a joint to break down. Because her foot had lost sensation, she didn't realize what had happened and continued to walk on it. Small pieces of bone broke off, clumped together and moved to the inner part of her foot, and one bone fragment eventually broke through her sole.

The change: The wound had to heal before surgery to remove the lump of bone could be performed, "and when you have diabetes, that takes forever," Elsmere says. In a cast for 19 weeks, she received weekly treatments at the wound clinic at Banner Good Samaritan Medical Center in Phoenix. Roeder performed surgery in May, sawing off the lump of bone and cutting the Achilles tendon to stretch it to its proper position.

The results: "Everything's healed now, and the worst is over," Elsmere says. She'll wear braces and orthopedic shoes on both feet for the rest of her life, because her experience put extra stress on the unaffected foot.

"I used to wear heels to work and sandals the rest of the time," she says, "and the first thing I'd do when I got home was kick off my shoes. That was the high point of my day."

Those habits aren't possible any longer. Twice-a-day foot inspections, then back on with the shoes to avoid injury, are her new routine.

"Everything revolves around my foot now," she says, adding that she feels lucky nonetheless. "A couple of years ago, they would have had to amputate it."