

## **Script – Print – Back on two feet: one patient's recovery thanks to limb salvage surgery**

Ron Carlson had been hampered by various health problems for several years.

The Rockford resident has lived with diabetes for 30 years. Nearly 20 years ago, Carlson had quadruple bypass surgery.

Then in 2022, the retired salesman developed a sore above his left ankle that wouldn't go away.

Carlson says it was a significant-sized wound. "When I first looked at it, my concern was, 'Hey, I'm not going to have a foot.' And they said, 'Yes, you will. And we can get through this, but it's going to take a while.' They were absolutely right."

"They said it was an ulcer that had to heal from the inside. Well, never healed and never healed. Just kept getting worse," he added. "And so finally, that's what eventually led me to Dr Cox."

Samantha Cox, DO, is a vascular surgeon with OSF HealthCare, who determined that Carlson needed limb salvage surgery as part of his care plan.

Limb salvage is surgery to repair and restore a limb (arm, leg or foot) that's diseased or injured. The surgery is an attempt to save a limb instead of opting for amputation.

"When it comes to limb salvage, he hits on all the pieces," says Dr. Cox. "He's got arterial disease, he's got venous disease, he's got diabetes. He's had a long-standing wound; all those things play into it."

Dr. Cox says it's important to take a holistic view of limb salvage when attempting to improve someone's lower extremity vascular disease. Surgery is becoming more common around the world as the number of people with diabetes increases.

Carlson had an extremely complex issue. In addition to his leg wound, Carlson had peripheral arterial disease (PAD), a condition where the arteries narrow and reduce blood flow to the arms or legs and causes pain. PAD can be the result of high cholesterol or diabetes.

"We had to get his blood sugar under control; we had to optimize his nutrition; we had to get into the wound care center," says Dr. Cox. "We had to fix his arterial disease; we had to fix and maintain his venous disease."

Dr. Cox performed two surgeries on Carlson to repair the arterial and venous diseases. Then she fixed his wound before sending him to the wound care center for further treatment.

Carlson is happy to be back on his feet again.

With help from his wife, Carlson manages to care for his wound daily, including cleaning and changing the dressing. "It's a process, but it has to be done, and that's how we take care of it," he says.

Carlson says his leg looks much better, and the circulation in his leg has improved.

And he has no restrictions. He's watching his six grandkids play sports and other activities.

"I couldn't really travel anywhere to go see them, to a sporting event or anything like that," Carlson says. "Just lately, I've been able to make that distance in traveling, for an hour or two hours, whatever it takes to get to where they're going. I can do that now."

Many people experience leg pain or heaviness, especially as they get older. Dr. Cox says it's important to have a conversation with your primary care provider to determine if you have a problem and the best way to approach treatment.

"The sooner you seek help from a professional, the quicker you are going to be on the road to recovery," says Dr. Cox. "These are very complex issues. We often say when it comes to limb salvage, it takes a village, and it truly takes a village of support for patients to get through these issues, whether it's management of arterial disease or venous disease, as in this patient's case. If it's a matter of wound care, we have resources to help people."

For more information on vascular programs and services, visit the OSF Cardiovascular Institute [website](#).