

GRAND RAPIDS + HEALTHCARE PROFILES



Leg Savers: Saving Limbs and Lives

Cardiovascular experts are urging patients: If amputation is recommended, always get a second opinion. The difference could mean life or death.

Most Americans have never heard of “critical limb ischemia” (CLI), let alone know how life-threatening the condition can be if not properly treated. But that doesn’t stop this deadly disease—characterized by reduced blood flow to the extremities that can result in pain, ulcers, and often amputation—from being the country’s No. 2 most prolific killer.

“CLI is second only to lung cancer, and it’s particularly dangerous for women, whose symptoms tend to present later in the progression of the disease,” says cardiovascular specialist and world-renowned CLI expert Dr. Jihad Mustapha, co-founder of Advanced Cardiac and Vascular Centers for Amputation Prevention (ACV).

Advanced CLI, he explains, is often—and incorrectly—treated with amputation,

which shortens life expectancy dramatically. “When you cut off a limb, there’s an unequal distribution of blood flow to other areas of the body, such as the brain, kidneys, and heart. That’s why so many amputees die prematurely from heart attacks, stroke, and kidney failure,” he says.

“The statistics are staggering,” adds Dr. Fadi Saab, fellow co-founder of ACV and Dr. Mustapha’s nephew. “After amputation, many patients end up not going home, not living independently, and not living for long.”

But limb-salvaging technology is evolving at a breakneck pace. The challenge is getting the message to both patients and medical providers that amputation is rarely the only option and that a second opinion could make the difference between life and death.

Save a Limb, Save a Life

“It’s exciting that the field of CLI and limb salvage is evolving so rapidly, but it’s sad and frustrating that patients are often given the wrong advice because many healthcare providers aren’t aware of new technologies,” says Dr. Saab.

That’s why Drs. Mustapha and Saab have dedicated their lives and careers to raising awareness about the power and possibility of limb salvage. They opened ACV to provide comprehensive, patient-centered care from initial evaluation through treatment and follow-up, and they host symposiums that educate thousands of physicians annually in the newest CLI technologies.

Worth the Hard Work

It’s 6:30 p.m. on a Tuesday, and Drs. Mustapha and Saab are scrubbing in for a new limb-saving procedure. They won’t finish until 10 p.m., long after their families have had dinner and their children have gone to bed.

Their work comes at a cost, but to them, it’s worth it. It’s worth it when patients bake them cookies out of gratitude, write heartfelt thank-you notes, and send videos of them walking when they were once told amputation was their only option.

Indeed, every limb, every patient, every life is worth their efforts.

“We feel blessed to be so successful at what we do,” says Dr. Saab, “because when you save a limb, you’re really saving a life.”

Do you suffer from chronic leg pain? It may be more than aches or age. Recognizing symptoms early is critical to reduce your risks for complications.

- Cramping or aching in hip, thigh, or calf muscles after activities such as walking or climbing stairs
- Leg numbness or weakness
- Leg coolness
- Sores on toes, feet, or legs that won’t heal
- Skin discoloration on legs and/or feet
- No pulse or a weak pulse in legs or feet

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