



Workplace accident the impetus for putting health and safety first

Young Cheltenham sign installer, Jason Fleet, was given a clear choice by his plastic surgeon after a heavy real estate sign collapsed onto his toe: get healthy and save your toe from gangrene or amputation.

It was a great incentive for Jason to quit a 10-year smoking and drinking habit, and one that he is thankful for – despite the circumstances.

The workplace accident happened when he and a couple of other employees were cleaning up the storage warehouse.

“We were moving one of the larger signs and all of a sudden it slipped and guillotined my right toe. I tried to deal with the pain and keep working but I could feel the inside of my boot was all gummy and wet, so I took a break and checked it out,” Jason explained. “When I saw the toe was totally crushed I realised I needed help.”

After Jason reported the injury to his boss, a colleague took him to Flinders Medical Centre, where he underwent an operation performed by a plastic surgeon who essentially re-made Jason’s toe and toenail. “After the operation he told me that my smoking and drinking habits could really delay my healing. When he said that I had a good chance of keeping the toe if I gave up, I made the decision then. Saving my toe became the focus.”

A two-day stay in hospital was followed by weekly check-ups and changes of his wound dressings.

“I had lots of trouble walking – tortoise-pace was about it – and I had to miss the Clipsal race, which was disappointing for me. In the early stages I had to elevate the foot every hour or so and I couldn’t move around much. When I got crutches it helped.”

It took about two months until Jason was able to walk properly and put pressure on his toe. “The rate of healing was excellent and I was really keen to go back to work, so my boss organised some light duties as soon as I could manage it.”

Jason describes his employer, Smart Posts, as exceptionally supportive. “My boss has been like a father to me and really helped me through it to get back to work.” Similarly, his case manager was “always encouraging” and made a big difference in keeping him focused on recovery and returning to his job.

“She made all the arrangements with my work’s accounts person and helped the process run smoothly. If it wasn’t for people like my boss and case manager, I don’t think I would have come back to work so soon; I think I would have been more cautious and just stayed at home,” said Jason.

Jason realises now that returning to work was just what he needed. “I was already getting bored just sitting around, and even when I was on light duties I was wanting to do more – I felt like I wasn’t giving enough to the company.”

After three months Jason was back at work in his usual job, but with a changed attitude and some new lessons under his belt. “Now I take time to think things through – to think about the risks. I’m responsible for my own health and so I don’t just focus on getting a job done – but getting it done safely.”