“We were relying on self-reports of these conditions that even rheumatologists have a hard time diagnosing, and... many of these conditions are extremely rare. So we ended up with very small numbers, and it was really not possible to either confirm or refute whether there is an association,” said Dr. Brinton.

The investigators note that their observations of selection and reporting biases underscore the complexities of evaluating the relationship of implants and CTDs.

“Thus, future studies designed to resolve the question of a possible association between breast implants and rheumatoid arthritis or other CTDs would need to be very large and include well-validated and documented cases and unbiased assessments of exposure,” they said.

“There were a lot of methodological problems with this study, and the authors did a good job of outlining them,” commented Diana Zuckerman, Ph.D., president of the National Center for Policy Research for Women & Families, a Washington-based nonprofit group. “This is the latest of several red flags warning women that the risks of breast implants have not been adequately studied,” she said in an interview.

**Fingerpricking Tied to Necrosis**

Fingerprick sites should be inspected regularly for skin necrosis in diabetic patients who have peripheral vascular disease, said Olivier Giannini, M.D., and Michael Mayr, M.D., of the University Hospitals of Basel (Switzerland).

The physicians reported the case of a 59-year-old diabetic man who was hospitalized for amputation of the lower right leg because of severe arterial occlusive disease. While recovering from the surgery, the patient took fingerprick blood samples to monitor his blood sugar. Within a few days, multiple small, well-circumscribed areas of skin necrosis around the fingerprick sites quickly progressed to full necrosis of the distal phalange, despite treatment with iloprost infusions, the investigators said (Lancet 2004;364:980).

Regular inspection of these sites may prevent such deterioration. If it does develop, capillary blood samples could be drawn from the thenar eminence, rather than the fingertips, they added.