

Foot and Ankle Care

Understanding Arthritis

A Patient's Guide



What is arthritis

and who develops it?

Simply put, arthritis is inflammation of a joint. But there's nothing simple about the pain or loss of mobility that can be associated with it. In fact, arthritis is the leading cause of disability in the United States. Although it can affect anyone, arthritis is mainly found in adults.

Osteoarthritis

The most common form of arthritis, osteoarthritis (OA) typically affects older people. The cartilage that normally cushions and protects the bones of the joint breaks down over time. Eventually, bone rubs against bone, opening the door to inflammation and other mechanical problems like bone spurs.

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a systemic inflammatory disease process that may affect the entire body. The body's immune response attacks the soft tissue in the joints causing inflammation and pain. Over time, the inflammation leads to compromises in the joint's cartilage and bone.



Arthritis caused by injury

When cartilage in the joints is damaged by a trauma like a fracture or dislocation, arthritis may develop. Even properly treated injured joints are much more likely to develop arthritis than joints that have not been injured.

What are the symptoms of arthritis?

Depending on which of the joints is affected, symptoms of arthritis vary. Typically, symptoms include pain, tenderness, swelling and difficulty moving the joint. Arthritis in the foot or ankle may make walking difficult and painful, reducing your activity level.

In order to diagnose you properly, your doctor will consider your symptoms, examine your feet, and take X-rays, a CT scan or MRI to get a clear view of the alignment of your toes and the condition of the joints in your feet.

How is arthritis treated?

Your doctor may recommend different treatment options depending on the type and severity of arthritis in your feet or ankles.

Manage the pain.

Your doctor may prescribe or recommend the use of anti-inflammatory medications (like aspirin or ibuprofen) and cold packs may help to reduce inflammation as well as the pain associated with arthritis. Sometimes a local injection of cortisone helps to further reduce inflammation.

Look at the big picture.

Your doctor may recommend that you lose weight, take certain nutritional supplements and exercise. In some cases, a physical therapist may help provide pain relief and the return of some lost mobility through guided exercise and other techniques.

Get the right support.

Orthotic devices sometimes help. Custom-made shoes and shoe inserts provide support. Your doctor may recommend a brace or a cane to help take some of the pressure off your affected joint while you walk.



Understand your surgical options.

If you are still experiencing arthritis pain after all other conservative measures have been taken, your doctor may

suggest surgery to help relieve your pain and restore your mobility. Your doctor will determine the proper surgical treatment based on the type of arthritis you have, its severity and its location. Today, a full range of surgical solutions are available that enable your doctor to customize surgical procedures to your particular needs and anatomy, whether you need arthroscopic debridement (removing inflamed and/or irritating debris from the joint), arthrodesis (fusing the joint for greater support) or arthroplasty (replacing the arthritic joint).

Be sure to talk with your doctor about the best treatment option for you.



Your doctor has provided this brochure to answer some of the questions you may have about how arthritis may affect your feet and ankles. It will also help you better understand what to expect if arthritis in your feet or ankles requires medical treatment.





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