

Care of Feet

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ARTHRITIS 
NEW ZEALAND

ENABLING A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

KAIPONAPONA AOTEAROA

Te whakapiki i te kounga ora

Did you know?

- The foot can be affected by **different types of arthritis**
- **Correct footwear** can take the strain off the ankle and knee joints
- Wearing correct footwear is crucial in preventing foot problems and **keeping you active**

Treatment and care of the foot affected by arthritis may be a multi-disciplinary effort involving a podiatrist, GP, rheumatologist and a surgeon working together to provide a solution.

Contents	Page
▪ <i>The foot</i>	3
▪ <i>Common problems</i>	3
▪ <i>Care of the feet</i>	4
▪ <i>Exercise</i>	4
▪ <i>Footwear</i>	5
▪ <i>Foot orthoses (shoe inserts)</i>	6
▪ <i>Medication, surgery, living with arthritis</i>	7
▪ <i>Where can I learn more?</i>	8

The foot

The foot is an amazing structure. It has 26 bones which bear the weight of the body, and all the forces involved in standing and walking – not to mention the stresses involved in sport and other strenuous activity. The 26 bones fit together in a complex arrangement and are linked by a large number of joints, held together by ligaments and tendons. The foot is often a neglected part of the body, despite the fact that foot problems can dramatically impact upon work, recreational and leisure activities.

All tissues and structures of the foot can be affected by arthritis including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, juvenile idiopathic arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, scleroderma, and gout. Treatment and care may be a multi-disciplinary effort involving a podiatrist, GP, rheumatologist, physiotherapist, orthotist and a surgeon, working together to provide a solution.

Common problems

Common problems associated with arthritis in the feet are swelling, pain, loss of flexibility and movement, joint deformity, thinning of the skin and loss of protective skin layers. The circulation and sensation to the foot may be decreased and sometimes there is an increased risk of infection and pressure sores. Bunions, hammer-toes, corns and calluses may form and sometimes the arch height will change. Finding suitable footwear may be a problem.

Care of the feet

- Wash and dry the feet carefully, particularly in between the toes. Apply moisturiser to dry skin.
- Keep toenails clean, short and trimmed. Cut or file your nails following the shape of the toe. Do not cut down the sides or corners as this may lead to 'ingrown toenails.' File sharp edges.
- Choose socks that are not too tight around your foot or ankle that have smooth seams that will not rub your toes.
- Visit a professional to have corns and hard layers of skin removed.

Exercise

Regular exercise helps to reduce pain and improve function by maintaining flexibility and movement. Walking is the best form of exercise because it places less stress on the joints. Tai Chi helps to develop good lower limb tone, posture and balance, which means less strain on the feet. Other beneficial forms of exercise include swimming and dancing.

Ankle and foot exercises can help to maintain flexibility and strengthen the joints. Try to exercise your ankles and point your toes before you get out of bed, whilst watching TV, or when sitting for long periods of time; another useful exercise is curling your toes while keeping your heel and toes in contact with the ground.



Footwear

Everyday footwear is often unsuitable for the arthritic foot. Prescription or alternative footwear (such as sport shoes) can reduce pain and the likelihood of pressure areas. Cushioned footwear can relieve the pain caused by the foot having lost its natural protection.

Wearing correct fitting footwear is crucial in preventing foot problems. Every time new shoes are purchased, they should be fitted, as size and shape vary with different brands. The size printed on the shoe is less important than how it 'feels.'

An adult's foot should be able to slide forward 1 cm in the shoe. For children this should be 1.8 cm to allow for growth. The heel should be firm and there should be enough room to wiggle the toes.



Important footwear features:

- Good quality running shoes are light, effectively absorb load and are usually wide fitting.
- Shoes with adjustable fastenings, such as laces or Velcro, allow for expansion if swelling occurs. Avoid shoes with bulky seams.
- Regular laces may be difficult for stiff fingers and elastic laces are a good alternative. It is also possible to purchase 'self-tying' laces that wrap around themselves.
- Flat, wide heels provide cushioning and assist with balance. The higher the heel, the more weight is thrown onto the toe joints.

Foot orthoses (shoe inserts)

Foot orthoses are available from a podiatrist or orthotist. They help prevent fatigue and muscle strain and may help you prevent the joints of the foot from degenerating due to the combination of stress and arthritis. Aligning the foot properly will also take strain off the ankle and knee joints and make your feet comfortable. The type of foot orthoses may range from a simple insole to customized foot orthoses. Customised foot orthoses are normally made-to-measure. A range of different materials are used depending upon the examination and assessment of the feet.

Medication

Medication can be an important factor in managing arthritis as it can help to control pain and inflammation. Other specific medications can help to slow the progress of the disease. Please seek advice from your doctor.

Surgery

Orthopaedic surgery may be necessary to correct severe deformities such as bunions and hammer-toes. Your GP will assist you in understanding the reasons for surgery.

Living with arthritis

A variety of known techniques can help people control and reduce the effects of arthritis. Research has shown that people who exercise regularly, practice relaxation and/or use other self management techniques have less pain and are more active than those people who are not self managers.

Medication, physical activity, joint protection, stress management, heat/cold therapy and weight control to prevent extra stress on weight bearing joints, are just some of the components of self management.



Where can I learn more?

www.arthritis.org.nz

Regional offices

Northern (Auckland) 09 523 8900

Midland/Central (Wellington) 04 472 1427

Southern (Christchurch) 03 366 8383

National office

Level 2, 166 Featherston Street

PO Box 10020, The Terrace

Wellington, 6143

Phone 04 472 1427

Fax 04 472 7066



ARTHRITIS NEW ZEALAND

Tollfree 0800 663 463

