

PATIENT
INFORMATION
LEAFLET

Osteoarthritis of the Foot and Ankle

Airedale NHS Foundation Trust
Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
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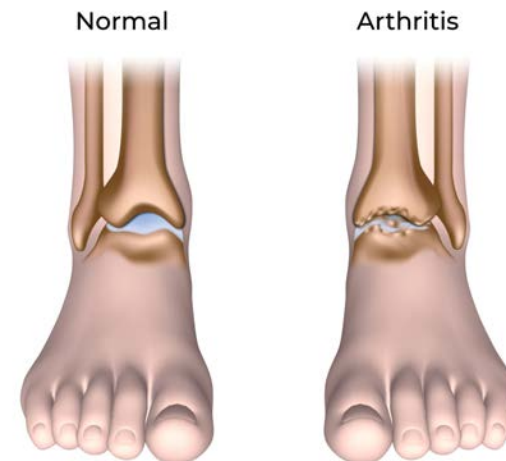
Introduction

The process of osteoarthritis involves the normal age-related changes of the cartilage joint surfaces. In addition, there may be stiffening to the soft tissue surrounding the joints, the joint capsule, swelling, some inflammation and pain. This leaflet relates to osteoarthritis (often shortened to be known as OA) in the ankle and foot.

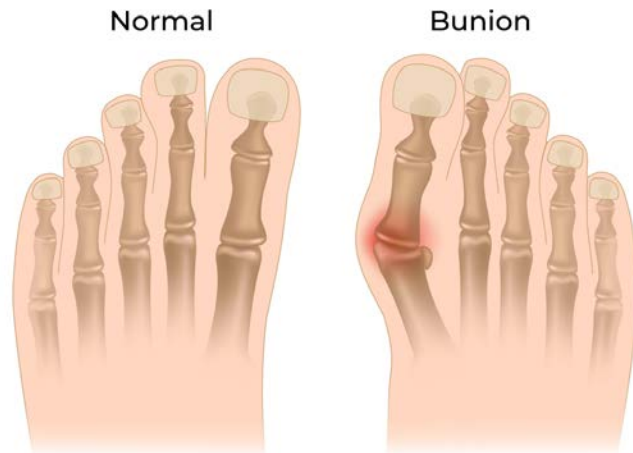
For further general information about Osteoarthritis visit
<https://www.versusarthritis.org>

What is osteoarthritis of the ankle and foot?

Osteoarthritis of the ankle joint is when these changes occur at the ankle joint. This may result in some pain and stiffness of the affected joint with a reduced range of movement.



Osteoarthritis can affect any joint in the foot, another common site for arthritis is the big toe joint. Arthritis in this joint can affect the joints shape, causing a bunion.



General Osteoarthritis Advice

When starting an exercise for the first time it is important to 'start low and go slow'. This means start with gentle exercises concentrating on the movement and slowly progress through weight bearing to resistance exercises.

Pain killers can be used to help you do the exercises. Talk to your doctor for more specific advice regarding pain killers.

However, there are many other options which can improve your pain. Consider appropriate footwear, and in particular weight loss (if you are overweight).

For more information on weight loss, please look at the following links;

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator/>
<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/start-the-nhs-weight-loss-plan/>

For more information on physical activity guidelines use the following link (<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/>).

Causes of Foot and Ankle Osteoarthritis

Several factors normally combine to cause symptoms of osteoarthritis:

- Previous joint damage (from trauma or other conditions such as such as rheumatoid arthritis)
- Increased bodyweight
- Age (risk increases with age)
- Family history (genetics)
- Poor ankle-foot alignment (termed biomechanics) such as a flat foot posture

Symptoms of Foot and Ankle Osteoarthritis

The main symptoms of osteoarthritis are;

- Pain
- Stiffness
- Swelling

Pain is most commonly felt across the front of the ankle joint. Pain and stiffness on walking and going up or down stairs can be the main aggravating activity. The foot may become less flexible, particularly on uneven surfaces.

Fortunately, the presence of osteoarthritis does not always cause pain so it is quite possible to be pain-free despite reasonably advanced arthritis.

Diagnosis of Foot and Ankle Osteoarthritis

Ankle and foot osteoarthritis can be reliably diagnosed by your Doctor or Physiotherapist by taking a history of your condition and by conducting a physical examination.

X-rays are not routinely required, but may be requested if symptoms are severe enough that injections or surgery are being considered.

Self Management of Foot and Ankle Osteoarthritis

In the majority of cases, the symptoms of ankle and foot osteoarthritis can be managed effectively. The two important things you can do to improve your symptoms are:

- Maintain activity levels as pain allows
- Lose excess weight

These measures can have significant effects on your symptoms, with no side effects or complications. They also have the added benefit of improving your general health.

Footwear

Wearing the appropriate footwear with adequate support under the arch of the foot is often a good way to help improve symptoms. If walking over very uneven ground boots with support around the ankle may also help. If a bunion is present or developing, footwear that is wider across the toe area is recommended as it reduces the pressure to the side of the toe caused by more pointed footwear.

Orthotics

Insoles that offer support under the arch of the foot can be effective at reducing pain. Those with a metatarsal pad can be more effective at easing pain under the ball of the foot.

Painkillers

Various medication can be used to manage your symptoms. It is important to remember painkillers do not treat the arthritis, only the symptoms. Therefore, it is important to use medication along with the

other methods described above. Speak to your healthcare professional for advice regarding painkillers.

What other treatments are there for osteoarthritis of the ankle and foot?

Other treatments from steroid injections to surgery are available. However, due to significant risks, these will only be considered once the above methods have been tried and failed.

Exercises for Foot and Ankle Osteoarthritis

Exercise 1: Ankle Circles



- While sitting or lying down on your back.
- Draw circles inwards with your ankle.

Exercise 2: Seated Heel Raises



- Sit towards the edge of a chair with your feet flat on the floor.
- Put your hands on your knees.
- Lift your heels so that you are on your toes whilst pressing down on your knees with your hands.
- Return to start and repeat.

Exercise 3: Seated Toe Curls with Towel



- Smooth the towel out and place one foot on it, flat.
- Keeping the heel still, pull the towel toward you by scooping it in with your arch and toes. Use both sides of your foot (all five toes) and try to create a deep dome under the arch area.
- You will only get a little bit of the towel to move each time you extend and pull back.

Exercise 4: Single Leg Mini Squat



- Stand on your affected leg.
- Bend your knee slightly and then return to your starting position.

Exercise 5: Single Leg Heel Raise



- Put your hand on a wall or other stable surface for balance.
- While standing on one leg, raise up on your toes as you lift your heel off the ground.
- Keep your knee straight.

Exercise 6: Dynamic Step Forward and Hold



- Step forward with one leg.
- Stop and stand on one leg while keeping the other leg off the floor for a second then step back.

What next?

If you are still experiencing symptoms despite following the above advice, it is important you seek advice from your GP. Your GP may decide to refer you to the musculoskeletal clinic or to a physiotherapist.