

Osteoarthritis of the Feet

This fact sheet has been written for people whose feet are affected by joint pain. It provides general information about ways you can look after your feet and manage your symptoms. It also tells you where to find further information and advice.

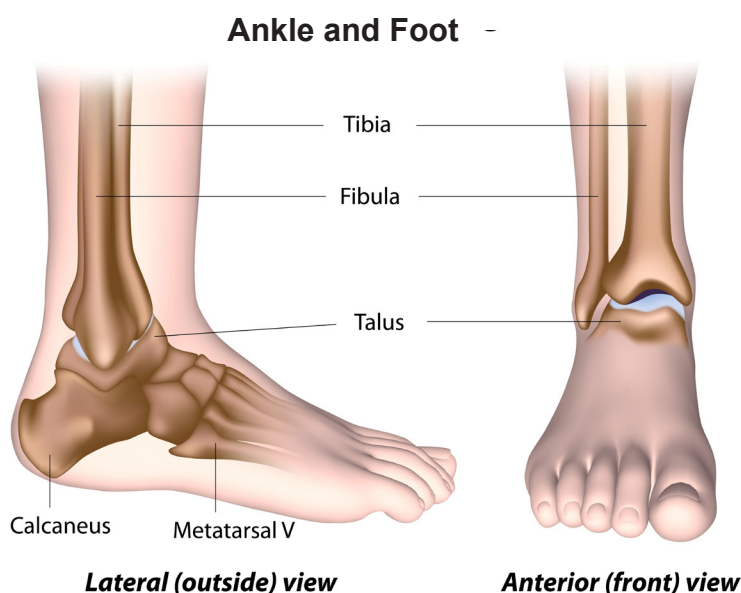
Your feet

The foot is comprised of three areas; the ankle (hindfoot), the middle of your foot (midfoot) and the toes (forefoot). It has 26 bones and 33 joints. Your feet support your body weight, so it's not surprising if you experience pain or discomfort in this area.

If your pain is persistent, it is best to see your doctor who can help determine if you have OA in the joints in your feet.

How your feet are affected by OA

Any joint in your ankles, feet and toes can be affected by OA, causing swelling and stiffness. OA is mostly found in the big toe joint and occasionally inflammation of this joint's base can cause stiffness and create a bunion. This makes standing and walking painful. You may also find your feet and/or toes change shape, making it harder to fit shoes. Here are some things that may help you manage such symptoms.



Exercise

Exercise is important to keep your joints moving. However you may need to try different types of exercise if you have painful feet. For example, consider exercising in water. The buoyancy of the water takes pressure off your ankles and feet and you may find you can move more freely than you can on land. For more information see the 'Water exercise' fact sheet. Strength training and cycling are also good forms of exercise that do not put as much pressure on sore feet as running. When you are exercising, make sure you wear supportive, comfortable shoes. See the 'Exercise' fact sheet for more information.

Weight loss

One of the best ways to take pressure off painful ankles and feet is to lose any extra body weight. Being overweight can worsen your symptoms, as your affected joints need to carry more weight. See the section above for tips on exercise if you have arthritis of the feet. You may find it useful to see a dietitian for advice about healthy eating. Also see the 'Weight control management' fact sheet for more information.

See a podiatrist

Podiatrists specialise in conditions affecting the feet. They can help you with advice about footwear, nail care

[Get help and more information at www.MyJointPain.org.au](http://www.MyJointPain.org.au)

and orthoses (inserts for your shoes that may help reduce foot pain). You will need a referral from your doctor to see a podiatrist in the public system (such as at a community health centre). These services are usually free or low cost.

You can consult a private podiatrist at any time without a referral from your doctor. Find a local podiatrist at the Australasian Podiatry Council website www.apodc.com.au or look under 'Podiatrist' in the Yellow Pages.

Footwear

The most important thing you can do to protect your feet is to wear supportive shoes that fit your feet properly. Keep these tips in mind when buying new shoes.

- Ask an experienced footwear sales person for help in choosing the right shoe and size. Remember, your shoe size may change if your feet are affected by arthritis.
- Try shoes on with any insoles or orthoses you normally wear. Some orthoses may need extra depth, particularly in the toe area.
- Your toes should not touch the end of your shoes as your toes or nails could become damaged. Make sure there is a 1cm gap at the end of your longest toe.
- Look for shoes with synthetic or rubber soles for better grip and shock absorption.
- Look for shoes that can be secured on



to your feet with laces and straps. Fastenings that may be easier to do up include Velcro, elastic shoelaces and zips. There are also many devices to help you put on shoes and do up fastenings. Contact an Independent Living Centre for advice.

If it is difficult to find shoes that fit because of swollen or misshapen joints, try extra depth footwear. Contact your local Arthritis Office or an Independent Living Centre for retailers or see a podiatrist for advice.

What else can I do?

There are other treatments that may help you deal with pain and stiffness:

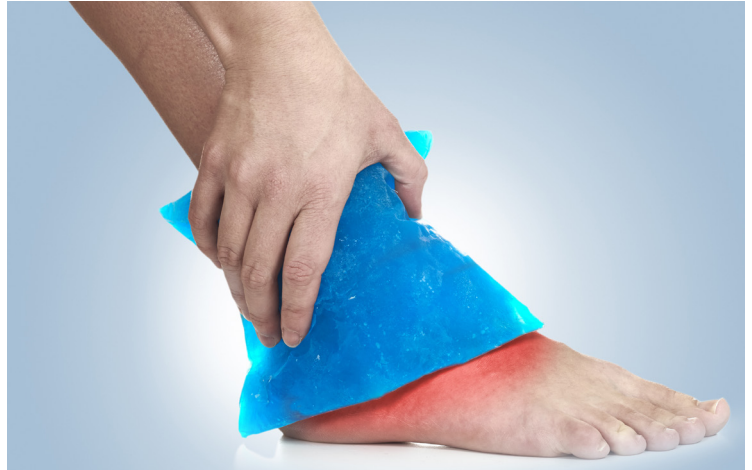
Medicines: Many different types of medicines can help the symptoms of arthritis. Your doctor or pharmacist can help you understand which medicines are right for you and how best to use them as even natural and over-the-counter medicines can have side effects. See the following for more information:

- Complementary medicines treatment
- Complementary treatments
- Simple pain relief medicines
- NSAIDs treatment

- Medicines and arthritis fact sheet
- Dealing with pain fact sheet

Acknowledge your feelings and seek support: It is natural to feel scared, frustrated, sad and sometimes angry when you have pain. Be aware of these feelings and get help if necessary. You can learn skills to recognise and calm anxiety or strong emotions if you find they start to affect your daily life. See the Awareness of thoughts & emotions treatment.

Heat and cold: Applying heat, such as a hot pack (microwaveable wheat pack), heating pad or hot water bottle, to stiff, painful joints may help relieve these symptoms. If your joints are hot and swollen you may find it useful to apply an ice pack. Try applying heat or cold to the painful area for 15 minutes. Always have a layer (such as a tea towel) between your skin and the heat or ice pack. You can repeat this whenever you need to throughout the day. Make sure the temperature of the skin returns to normal in between applying heat or ice packs to prevent damage to the tissues.



Creams: Applying creams or ointments to the skin in the affected area may help control pain. In particular, creams containing anti-inflammatory medicines or capsaicin (an ingredient in cayenne and chilli peppers) may be useful. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about these types of creams.

Glucosamine and chondroitin: It is unclear if glucosamine or chondroitin are useful for feet affected by arthritis. See the Complementary medicines treatment for more information.

Fish oils: Fish oils may be useful for some forms of arthritis that affect the feet. See the Nutrition treatment for more information.

Herbal therapies: There is no conclusive proof that herbal medicines are effective in treating arthritis of the feet. However see the Complementary medicines treatment for more information.

See the 'Dealing with pain' fact sheet for more information about managing pain.

Other Resources

State/Territory Arthritis Offices

Your local Arthritis Office can provide further information to assist you and will have a range of education and support activities. Click here to find your local office.

Independent Living Centres (ILCs)

These centres provide information about products and services to help people remain independent and improve their quality of life. They are located in each capital city. See www.ilcaustralia.org.au or call the National ILC Infoline on 1300 885 886 to find your closest centre and more information. (In Queensland, the

Independent Living Centre is called LifeTec).

Books

Tremaine, M David & Awad, Elias M 1998, The foot and ankle sourcebook, Lowell House, Los Angeles, CA.

Salmans, Sandra 1998, Your feet: Questions you have... answers you need, People's Medical Society, Allentown, PA.

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