

A foot health message from

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# Footscope

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## Foot health and aging

### Older feet shouldn't mean painful feet

As our feet grow older, they naturally develop more problems. But painful and uncomfortable feet are not a natural part of growing old, or something which we must just 'put up with'. Many older people believe it is normal for feet to hurt, and simply resign themselves to enduring foot problems which could be treated.

As we age, our feet tend to spread and lose the fatty pads that cushion the bottom of the feet. If we are carrying extra weight, this can also affect the bone and ligament structure. There are more than 300 different foot conditions and, for older people, most stem from the impact of years of use. There are simple things



which older people can do to combat these issues:

- Have feet measured for shoe size more frequently, rather than presuming that their shoe size remains constant. A shoe should hold your foot firmly in

place and give adequate support – floppy old favourites should be thrown out

- A shoe with a firm sole and a soft upper is best for daily activities
- Walking is good general exercise for most

people's feet

- Pantyhose and stocking should be of the correct size and preferably free of seams
- Avoid going barefoot, except at the beach
- Never cut corns or callouses with a razor,

pocket knife or other such instruments and don't use over-the-counter corn products as they may do more harm than good, unless they have been recommended by us

- Do not wear tight garters as these can affect your circulation
- Bathe your feet daily in lukewarm (not hot) water, using a mild soap containing moisturisers, or moisturise separately
- Trim or file your toenails so they are slightly curved just short of the end of the toe
- Inspect your feet every day
- Come visit us at least once a year or if you notice anything abnormal!

## Rheumatoid arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease which most commonly affects the small joints of the feet and hands. RA affects 0.5 to 1.0% of the world population and affects women three times more than men. Peak age at onset is most commonly the fifth decade, with the number of sufferers increasing with age. Symptoms include



severe pain, stiffness and loss of mobility. Profound fatigue, a general feeling of illness and ongoing flu-like symptoms can also result. The initial trigger is unknown but may be caused by either or both genetic and environmental factors. If left unchecked, the inflammation will lead to breakdown of bone and cartilage at the joints and, over time, issues with joint dislocation. This progressive joint destruction can eventually lead to varying degrees of physical disability, affecting jobs and activities. RA can also shorten a person's lifespan by up to 10 years in some cases.

The foot is the most common site affected in the early stages of RA. Foot involvement becomes

greater as the disease progresses. Flat feet is the most common structural deformity, reported in up to 46% of RA patients, and is usually caused by an overall softening of the supporting structures resulting in an arch collapse. Up to 76% of people with RA report difficulty in walking. Foot pain occurs in up to 94% of patients with the disease long-term and 74% in patients with early RA. Foot pain is believed to have the strongest influence on functional ability for people with RA. People with RA also often lose muscle mass and muscular strength because of the decrease in their mobility and use of their muscles. They may also suffer from a limited range of joint motion, poor

balance and difficulties with exercise.

This information comes from material generously supplied by - Brenton-Rule, A. (2013). Lecture 5: Rheumatoid arthritis and the foot. Auckland, New Zealand: Auckland University of Technology.

## Your footwear and arthritis

Good shoes can help relieve foot pain and maintain foot health for sufferers of arthritis – both Rheumatoid arthritis and Osteoarthritis.

When buying and fitting new shoes:

- Make sure there is enough space (a minimum of two centimeters) between the end of the longest toe and the front of the shoe
- Ensure the ball of the foot fits comfortably into the widest part of the shoe
- Do not purchase shoes that require wearing in
- The heel should fit comfortably and the shoes should not ride up and down when walking
- Buckles, laces or Velcro straps help keep the shoe on

Natural fibres such as leather can reduce the likelihood of developing skin irritations

And remember to visit us regularly!