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Common Foot and Ankle Conditions

Bunions (Hallux Valgus)



A bunion is a bony bump at the base of the big toe where it meets the foot. This changes the alignment of the bones, causing the base of the big toe to angle. Bunions can often be painful and cause swelling, making it difficult to find comfortable shoes.

When a bunion causes discomfort, it is usually because the bump is squeezed by a shoe. The pain can also be in the ball of the foot or in the other toes. The best treatment is to wear well-fitted shoes. Wide shoes with soft leather or synthetic materials that accommodate the bump and don't cause pressure on the sore spots provide relief. High-heeled shoes often make the symptoms worse. Strapping, taping, or splinting the big toe may help relieve symptoms in the short-term. When bunions remain painful despite appropriate shoe wear,

surgical correction may be necessary. During surgery, the deformed joint is corrected by breaking and resetting the bone in a straighter position.

Big Toe Arthritis (Hallux Rigidus)

Hallux rigidus is arthritis of the joint at the base of the big toe. It is the most common arthritic condition of the foot, affecting 1 in 40 people over the age of 50. Most patients complain of pain in the big toe joint while active, especially when pushing off to walk. There can also be swelling around the big toe joint or difficulty moving and bending the toe. A bump, like a bunion, can develop on top of the big toe joint and be aggravated by rubbing against the inside of a shoe.

The cause of hallux rigidus is not known but there are several risks factors, including a long or elevated first foot bone (metatarsal) or other differences in foot anatomy, injury to the big toe, and family history. These can lead to excessive wear of the joint, which in turn leads to arthritis.

Non-surgical management includes pain relievers and anti-inflammatory medicines, ice or heat packs to reduce pain, and changes in footwear. Avoid thin-soled shoes or high-heeled shoes and look for shoes with a stiff sole or curved sole (rocker bottom). Shoe inserts (orthotics) can also help.

Although these treatments may help decrease the symptoms, they do not stop the condition from progressing and if pain persist, surgical treatment is recommended. Techniques include removing some bone on the top of the metatarsal (Cheilectomy), joint fusion (Arthrodesis) or joint resurfacing (Interpositional Arthroplasty).

Flat Foot

People with flat feet, also known as fallen arches, have either no arch in their feet or one that is very low. There is usually a gap beneath the inner part of the foot when standing. The arches provide a spring to the step and help to distribute body weight across the feet and legs.



Flat Foot - continued

The most common symptom of flat feet is pain in the feet. Abnormal stresses on the knee and hip may result in pain in these joints. These stresses are likely if the ankles turn inward.

Although flat feet can be caused by genetic factors, injury or arthritis, age also can play a role. The posterior tibial tendon, the primary support structure of the foot arch, can weaken.

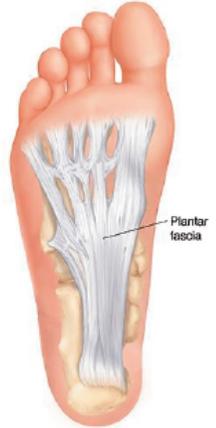
Specific exercises to manage the symptoms of flat feet or prevent them from developing are helpful and supportive well-fitted shoes can provide relief. Fitted insoles and orthotics or custom-designed arch supports may relieve pressure on the arch and reduce pain if the feet roll too far inward. However, these products only treat the symptoms and do not provide long-lasting benefits. More severe cases may require corrective bracing or surgery.

Plantar Fasciitis

Plantar fasciitis is one of the most common causes of heel pain. It involves inflammation of a thick band of tissue that runs across the bottom of your foot and connects your heel bone to your toes (plantar fascia). Plantar fasciitis typically causes a stabbing pain in the bottom of your foot near the heel. The pain is usually the worst with the first few steps in the morning but can also be triggered by long periods of standing or rising from sitting.

Though plantar fasciitis can occur without an obvious cause, factors that can increase your risk of developing plantar fasciitis include age (most common between the ages of 40 and 60); certain types of exercise such as long-distance running, ballet dancing and aerobic dance; foot mechanics; and occupations that keep you on your feet.

Ignoring plantar fasciitis may result in chronic heel pain that interrupts your regular activities. Changing the way you walk to minimize plantar fasciitis pain might lead to foot, knee, hip or back problems.



Achilles Tendonitis

The Achilles tendon connects the three strongest flexor muscles of the leg to the foot. The Achilles tendon joins the calf muscles to the heel bone and runs down the back of the lower leg. When this tendon is put under excess strain, it can become inflamed causing Achilles tendonitis.



Treatment depends on the severity of the condition and activity level. Usually it is resolved by stretching, physical therapy, rest, activity modification, ice, anti-inflammatory drugs, and bracing. If the pain persists for a prolonged period of time, surgery may be necessary.

Mid-foot arthritis

Midfoot arthritis is characterized by pain and swelling in the midfoot that is aggravated by standing and walking. There is often an associated bony prominence on the top of the foot. Non-operative treatment consisting of use of a stiff-soled comfort shoe, activity modification, weight-loss, calf stretching and anti-inflammatory medications can be quite effective.

If surgery becomes necessary, it is often to fuse the involved joints (midfoot fusion). By eliminating the movement through the arthritic joints, the pain originating from these joints is eradicated. This type of surgery requires strong fixation and a period of non-weight bearing (or limited weight bearing) for 6-8 weeks.

Stress Fractures

Stress fractures are tiny cracks in a bone. They are caused by repetitive force. At first, you might barely notice the pain associated with a stress fracture, but it tends to worsen with time. The tenderness usually originates from a specific spot and decreases during rest. You might have swelling around the painful area.

Treatment for stress fractures usually involves immobilization, rest, ice, elevation, supportive footwear, and activity modification. In most cases, it takes 8-12 weeks for stress fracture to heal.