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Foot Arthritis

Arthritis in the foot is quite common. Arthritis is the destruction and loss of cartilage in a joint for any of a number of reasons. These can include gradual loss over time due to general wear and tear (osteoarthritis), loss due to chronic inflammatory states such as rheumatoid arthritis, gouty arthritis, or due to prior injury to the joint (post-traumatic arthritis).

During walking, the foot is subject to forces of 1.2 times body weight. During running, this can increase to 4-6 times body weight! It is quite amazing to think that we take approximately 1 million steps per year. Unlike the hip and knee, the joints of the foot see significantly more shear stress due to the horizontal position of the foot.

How do I know that my pain is due to Arthritis?

This requires combining your story of pain symptoms along with clinical and radiographic examination.

Once foot arthritis has developed, what can be done?

Treatment depends on underlying cause and location of the arthritis, and should be verified by clinical and radiographic examination.

Non-operative management consists of unloading the painful joint(s). This can be done initially with off-the-shelf shoe inserts, stiff soled shoes or rocker bottom shoes, NSAIDs (Advil, Aleve, etc.) as tolerated, and topical gels (IcyHot/Capsaicin cream). Arthritis of the foot is commonly associated with a tight achilles tendon, therefore a routine achilles stretching program should be followed. (see Achilles stretching program-link)

If symptoms continue, custom inserts and corticosteroid injections can provide good symptom relief.

If non-operative management fails to provide relief, or if symptoms return after a period of improvement with non-operative management, a surgical procedure can often dramatically decrease pain and improve function. The appropriate procedure depends on the joint(s) involved and should be discussed with Dr. Feinblatt.

I don't have foot arthritis, but is there anything I can do to prevent it?

While there is little good scientific data to suggest ways to prevent arthritis in the foot, the most logical suggestion is to maintain an appropriate body weight. Arthritis of the foot is also commonly associated with a tight achilles tendon, therefore a routine achilles stretching program should be followed. (see Achilles stretching program-link)

Pain at arthritic spur

