

## **Rheumatoid / Inflammatory Arthritis**

This leaflet is intended to provide simple practical information about how rheumatoid arthritis may affect feet and about how you can self-manage any problems.

Rheumatoid arthritis is an inflammatory condition, often affecting the small joints of hands and feet. It is more common amongst women than men.

Treatment is mainly with painkillers and anti-inflammatory drugs. The cause of the condition is not clearly understood.

Your feet are vulnerable and potentially at risk of developing ulceration due to changes in the structure of the foot, joint changes and as result of changes to the skin.

Ulceration can be persistent sores or breaks in the skin that will not heal.

Toes may become deformed and painful. Joints, particularly on the balls of the feet, can become swollen and tender.

Your circulation and sensation may be impaired and the drugs you are taking may affect the quality of your skin and your ability to heal. This can lead to ulceration. You must contact your GP surgery, Podiatrist or Rheumatology team if you develop foot ulceration. Corns and hard skin that results from deformities may need treatment.

Depending upon the severity of the condition, made-to-measure footwear and pressure relieving insoles may be required.

### **Suitable footwear**

Due to changes in the structure of the foot, joint changes and as result of changes to the skin, sensible footwear is essential to prevent further foot deformity and joint damage.

The shoe should be the correct length and have adequate width and depth to accommodate foot deformities.

There should be 1 cm or 0.5 inches between the end of your longest toe and the end of your shoe.

The upper should be soft with no hard seams or ridges and made from a natural fibre such as leather which allows moisture to evaporate.

The shoe needs to hold your foot firmly in place with an adjustable fastening, i.e. laces, straps with buckles or Velcro.

The toe box should be round and deep to give the toes room to move. The heel should be flat, broad and stable

The shoe needs a firm heel counter that fits snugly around the back of the heel and helps to maintain and stabilise the heel in place as the shoe makes contact with the ground.

Ideally the shoe will have a sole that is not too thin or flexible. A more rigid rocker type sole is perfect. Similar to what you would get in a pair of good walking boots or shoes.

A shoe with a soft insole may help to protect any tender joints on the soles of the feet.

Slippers are not a good idea to wear around the house, especially if you have been advised to wear insoles or special shoes

Occasionally, if your foot deformity is severe, prescribed footwear can be obtained via the orthotics service. You could ask your GP or podiatrist if your foot problems require a referral to this service.

There are also a number of devices to help people with putting on socks, tights / stockings and shoes. Further information is available from the Disabled Living Foundation or through your local occupational therapist

### **Foot Problems**

Rheumatoid arthritis may affect your circulation and the medication you take may affect the rate at which you heal.

If you notice any cuts or sores on your feet, cover them with a clean dressing and contact your doctor or nurse or podiatry department.

## What you can do to help your feet

If you have difficulty cutting your nails because of painful joints in your hands, you could try filing your nails once or twice a week with a long handled file. You should sit in a chair with arms, your feet placed on a stool and file in one direction across the nail away from you. Clean the debris from between the toes with a clean tissue.

Have a regular foot care routine. A pumice stone can be used to smooth any hard skin or callus on the bottom of the feet and a moisturising cream can help to improve the condition of your skin (do not apply cream between the toes).

Do not use corn plasters or corn remover cream as they contain a chemical which can do more harm than good.

Lose weight if you are overweight. You can get support from local weight management services; speak to your GP or Podiatrist.

Most people will be able to care for their foot pain themselves. If needed, more specific treatments can include:

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) in tablet or gel form
- Insoles / Orthotics
- Steroid injections
- Surgery.

To find out more about rheumatoid arthritis and how it affects feet contact:

Arthritis Research Campaign  
PO Box 177  
Chesterfield S41 7TQ

Or look on the following websites  
[www.arthritisresearchuk.org](http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org)

[www.prcassoc.org.uk](http://www.prcassoc.org.uk)

You can search for other information leaflets on [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk) and your G.P. also has access to this website

You may need to see a podiatrist (Health and Care Professions Council Registered) for treatment or for advice about suitable footwear.

Please contact the podiatry department on ☎(01803) 217711 (08.45 – 15.45) if you:

--require further information  
--if you require this leaflet in a different format

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[www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/](http://www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/)

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.



Torbay and South Devon  
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## PATIENT INFORMATION

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Department of Podiatry and Foot  
Health

*Working with you, for you*