Orthotics4U.com | Dr. Milton J. Stern, DPM
Patient Education

ARTHRITIS OF THE FOOT AND ANKLE

Causes, Symptoms, Treatment & the Role of Orthotics





What Is Foot and Ankle Arthritis?

Arthritis is a chronic joint condition that causes the cartilage in the joints of the foot and ankle to break down. This leads to pain, stiffness, swelling, and reduced joint motion, which can make walking and everyday activities more difficult.

Types of Arthritis



Osteoarthritis (Degenerative Arthritis)
The most common type, caused by normal wear and tear over time.



Rheumatoid Arthritis
An autoimmune condition in which the body's immune system attacks the joints.



Gouty Arthritis
Caused by a buildup of uric acid crystals in the joint, often with sudden, severe pain.

Common Symptoms

- **Pain** in the foot or **ankle**, especially with weight bearing.
- **Stiffness**, particularly in the morning or after periods of rest.
- **Swelling** around the affected joint.
- **Reduced range of motion.**
- A feeling of joint instability.
- **Difficulty** walking, standing, or being active.

Common Areas Affected



Risk Factors

- **Aging** – cartilage naturally wears down over time.
- **Previous Injuries** – fractures, sprains, or joint damage.
- **Foot Structure Problems** – such as flat feet or high arches.
- **Overuse** – repetitive stress from standing, walking, or sports.
- **Inflammatory Conditions** – such as rheumatoid arthritis.
- **Family History** – a genetic predisposition can increase risk.

X-Ray Examples



Normal Ankle Joint



Arthritic Ankle (Joint Space Narrowing and Bone Changes)

Treatment Options

Treatment depends on the type and severity of the arthritis and may include:

- **Activity Modification** – reduce high-impact activities that aggravate symptoms.
- **Medications** – such as anti-inflammatory drugs (e.g., ibuprofen) to reduce pain and swelling.
- **Physical Therapy** – to maintain joint motion, strengthen supporting muscles, and improve balance.
- **Injections** – corticosteroid or viscosupplement injections can provide temporary relief.
- **Surgery** – in more advanced cases, options may include joint cleanup (debridement), **joint fusion** (arthrodesis), or joint replacement.

How Orthotics Help



- **Redistribute pressure** away from arthritic joints.
- **Provide arch and joint support** to improve alignment.
- **Reduce abnormal motion** that can worsen joint wear.
- **Improve stability and shock absorption** with every step.
- **Help relieve pain** and allow for more comfortable, active living.



Key Takeaway

Arthritis of the foot and ankle can cause chronic pain and limit your activity, but with the right combination of treatment and custom orthotics, you can reduce pain, improve function, and maintain a better quality of life.