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Testing for Arthritis

In addition to a physical exam your NorthPointe doctor may look to other testing to verify a diagnosis of arthritis.

X-rays. An x-ray of an arthritic foot may show narrowing of the joint space between bones (an indication of cartilage loss), changes in the bone (such as fractures), or the formation of bone spurs. Weight-bearing x-rays are taken while you stand. They are the most valuable additional test in diagnosing the severity of arthritis and noting any joint deformity associated with it.

Other imaging tests. In some cases, a bone scan, computed tomography (CT) scan, or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan may be needed to determine the condition of the bone and soft tissues.

Laboratory tests. Your doctor may also recommend blood tests to determine which type of arthritis you have. With some types of arthritis, including rheumatoid arthritis, blood tests are important for an accurate diagnosis.

Although your symptoms and the results from a physical examination and tests may be consistent with rheumatoid arthritis, there are other less common types of inflammatory arthritis that may be considered.

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ARTHRITIS AND YOUR FEET

Arthritis is an inflammation and swelling of the cartilage and lining of the joints, generally accompanied by an increase in the fluid in the joints. It is a disabling and occasionally crippling disease afflicting almost 50 million Americans. In some forms, it appears to be hereditary. Although the prevalence of arthritis increases with age, all people from infancy to middle age are potential victims. People over 50 are the primary targets.

The month of May has been set aside as National Arthritis Awareness Month. It is a time to spread the message about prevention methods and treatment of arthritis. NorthPointe Foot & Ankle has information to help understand the symptoms and treatments of arthritic feet.

There is usually no need to endure years of painful ambulation because of arthritic feet. Most conditions can be diagnosed and treated either conservatively or surgically by our NorthPointe podiatrists.

Because each foot has 33 joints that can be afflicted - and there is no way to avoid the tremendous weight-bearing load on the feet - feet are very susceptible to arthritis. Arthritic feet can result in loss of mobility and independence. However, early diagnosis and proper medical care can limit or slow the damage.

Symptoms include:

- Early morning stiffness.
- Limitation in motion of joint.
- Recurring pain or tenderness in any joint.
- Redness or heat in a joint.
- Skin changes, including rashes and growths.
- Swelling in one or more joints.

Forms of Arthritis

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis. It is frequently called *degenerative*

joint disease or *wear and tear arthritis*. Aging usually brings on a breakdown in cartilage, and pain gets progressively more severe. Dull, throbbing nighttime pain is characteristic, and may be accompanied by muscle weakness or deterioration.

Many of these symptoms can be relieved with rest. Overweight people are particularly susceptible to osteoarthritis. The additional weight contributes to the deterioration of cartilage and the development of bone spurs.

Rheumatoid arthritis is a major crippling disorder and the most serious form of arthritis. It is a complex, chronic inflammatory group of diseases, often affecting more than a dozen smaller joints during its course. In the foot, it frequently affects both ankles and toes.



Posttraumatic Arthritis can develop after an injury to the foot or ankle. Dislocations and fractures—particularly those that damage the joint surface—are the most common injuries that lead to posttraumatic arthritis. Like osteoarthritis, posttraumatic arthritis causes the cartilage between the joints to wear away. It can develop many years after the initial injury.

Arthritis treatments include:

- Physical therapy and exercise.
- Anti-inflammatory medication and/or steroid injections into the affected joint.
- Orthotics or specially prescribed shoes
- Joint replacement

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Arthritis and Exercise

Exercise is crucial for people with arthritis. It increases strength and flexibility, reduces joint pain, and helps combat fatigue. When arthritis threatens to immobilize you, exercise keeps you moving. Follow this advice for walking safely.



Before you get walking, a series of loosening-up exercises will help alleviate any muscle stiffness or pulled muscles that may be ahead of

you. Take five deep breaths for each slow stretch and hold the stretched muscle firm without bouncing. After every walk, stretch again to improve circulation and decrease buildup of lactic acid, the chemical byproduct that causes muscles to ache.

Setting appropriate goals is vital to a successful walking program. First, make walking a habit. Start slowly, with five or ten-minute walks three to five times a week. As walks get longer, their frequency can be adjusted.

Before you know it, you'll be making time for weekly walks wherever you are. But don't overdo it. Starting too quickly and getting injured or uncomfortably sore may decrease your enthusiasm before walking has had a chance to work its magic on your mind and body.

Start your walks slowly, and gradually work up to a brisk speed that will cover a mile in 15 minutes (that's four miles per hour). Measure a one-mile stretch, record your time, and see how you improve as the weeks go by.

To get significant benefits from walking, you must eventually be able to walk 20 minutes at a brisk pace without stopping. Walks shouldn't last more than an hour. Calculate your week's total walking time in minutes, then try to increase it by 10 percent each week. A starting regimen should involve walking at least three times per week, but never exceeding five times a week. Walking every day denies the body the rest time it needs to repair minor injuries and could lead to more serious ones.

Prevent Foot Injuries During Exercise

NorthPointe Foot & Ankle has some good tips to keep your feet healthy while being active.

Wear good athletic shoes, such as shoes with cushioned soles (especially heels) and good arch support. Physical therapists, orthopedists, podiatrists, and sports medicine health professionals can advise you.

Buy new shoes every few months, because padding wears out. Also buy new shoes if the tread or heels wear down. The expense is worth preventing ongoing (chronic) foot or ankle problems.



Be reasonable in your training:

- Stretch your foot, ankle, and leg muscles before and after exercise.

- Avoid rapidly

increasing the number of miles you run, running or training uphill, and running on hard surfaces, such as concrete.

- Avoid excessive sprinting (short, rapid bursts of running).
- Avoid sudden changes in your training program. Gradually increase the amount of exercise you are doing until you reach your training program goals.

National Senior Health & Fitness Day is May 25

Are your feet in good shape?



It's normal for people to experience some foot problems as they age. But experts say that problems with feet can be the first sign of more serious medical conditions, particularly among older adults. Health problems, such as arthritis, diabetes, nerve issues, and circulatory disorders, may first be manifested in the feet. That is why it is important to pay attention to your feet and seek medical attention as soon as you notice a problem.

- Practice good foot care. Check your feet regularly or have a member of your family check them for you.
- Keep blood circulating to your feet as much as possible. Do this by putting your feet up when you are sitting or lying down, stretching if you've had to sit for a long while, walking, having a gentle foot massage, or taking a warm foot bath.
- Wear comfortable shoes that fit well to prevent pressures that can lead to friction and infection.
- Avoid exposing your feet to cold temperatures.



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