

# Rheumatoid Arthritis and the Feet

## About Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is an inflammatory condition affecting joints. Inflammation attacks the fluid inside the joint (synovial fluid), and can damage muscles, tendons ligaments and bone in that area. It can also affect other parts of the body. Often it is the small joints of the hands and feet that are affected first. RA can make joints swollen and stiff, especially in the morning. The condition may be diagnosed with x-ray or blood tests, and tablets may be used to slow down the condition and help with pain.

## How will it affect your Feet?

The inflammation caused by RA can affect the feet and cause them to change shape and often become very painful. The feet become wider, broader and larger in size. Bunions may form, and the toes may become clawed or hammered, leading to corns on the tops of the toes. Some toes may even overlap. Hard skin may form on the soles of the feet, and skin may feel drier. You also may notice a change to your toenails. Muscles may weaken causing arches to drop and weakening the ankles. This may cause unsteadiness leading to tripping and falls.



## How can a Podiatrist help?

The podiatrist will be able to treat corns and calluses, and can monitor your feet. They can help prevent future complications by applying padding and strapping, or by manufacturing insoles to help support your feet. They can also advise you about footwear.

## What Shoes should I wear?

Laced buckled or Velcro-fastening shoes are best as they help to support the foot when walking. Look for shoes with soft leather uppers that are rounded at the toe, and check that they are deep enough to accommodate any toe deformities. Soles should be lightweight and flexible, with good grips to prevent slipping. A good insole will absorb shock when walking. Slippers, slip-ons, court shoes or backless shoes, give no support to the feet. A good shoe will make a great difference to the shape and condition of your feet.

## Self Help

- Cut toe nails following the natural curve. You may find it easier to file if you have problems gripping clippers.
- Wash feet daily with a mild soap and warm water, and dry well. It may be easier to dry between the toes with a cotton bud.
- Moisturize the feet daily to prevent hard skin, but do not apply the cream between the toes.
- Try to exercise your feet regularly as this will keep them supple and prevent stiffness. To do this, rotate the feet in a circular motion in the air when lying or sitting.

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## Data Protection

Any personal information is kept confidential. There may be occasions where your information needs to be shared with other care professionals to ensure you receive the best care possible.

In order to assist us to improve the services available, your information may be used for clinical audit, research, teaching and anonymised for National NHS Reviews and Statistics.

Further information is available via Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust website (<https://www.qegateshead.nhs.uk/fairprocessing>) or by contacting the Data Protection Officer by telephone on 0191 445 8418 or by email [ghnt.ig.team@nhs.net](mailto:ghnt.ig.team@nhs.net).

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