

# Rheumatoid arthritis and your feet

## Information sheet

### What is rheumatoid arthritis?

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a condition where the body's natural defence mechanism is activated and starts to attack the joints, tendons and sometimes other parts of the body.

The cause is not known but it seems to run in families and lifestyle is thought to play a part.

### Who can get rheumatoid arthritis?

Rheumatoid arthritis affects around one in 100 people of all ages but it commonly starts between 30-50 years of age. It also tends to affect women more than men.

### How might it affect your feet?

Rheumatoid arthritis is particularly known to affect the small joints of the hands and feet. Damage to the joints and tendons in the feet can cause the arch to flatten, which can lead to other complications and painful pressure areas, these include:

**Bunions:** The big toe turns outward leaving the joint exposed to pressure

**Hammer/clawed toes:** The small toes become misshapen and sometimes sit on top of each other

**Bursae:** Deep within the foot are fluid-filled sacks over bony areas. These may become enlarged and inflamed.

**Enlarged joints:** Joints become enlarged as the arthritis damages the joints

**Metatarsalgia:** Pain under the ball of the foot

**Callus (hard skin) corns and ulcers (open sores in the skin):** These can be due to prolonged pressure.

## Can I prevent rheumatoid arthritis from getting worse?

If you have rheumatoid arthritis, usually you are under the care of a rheumatologist. Although it may not be possible to prevent the progression of rheumatoid arthritis there are some steps that you can take to help keep you mobile and your feet comfortable.

- Good personal hygiene, including drying between toes
- Use cream if your skin is dry. This will help prevent dry skin from cracking. Do not apply cream between the toes as this can cause the skin to become too moist
- Use surgical spirit between toes if they are moist
- Adequate shoe wear, preferably with a lace-up or Velcro fastening, with adequate depth, width and a thickened sole
- Regular visits to your podiatrist for treatments if you already have a foot condition. Your podiatrist will also be able to advise you on padding, insoles, and footwear to reduce the pressure on painful joints.

## Useful contacts

### **Arthritis Research UK**

Copeman House, St Mary's Gate, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S41 7TD  
0300 790 0400  
[arthritisresearchuk.org](http://arthritisresearchuk.org)

### **Arthritis Care**

18 Stephenson Way London NW1 2HD  
Helpline (freephone): 0808 800 4050  
[arthritiscare.org.uk](http://arthritiscare.org.uk)

### **Disabled Living Foundation (DLF)**

380-384 Harrow Road London W9 2HU  
020 7289 6111 Helpline 0845 130 9177  
[dif.org.uk](http://dif.org.uk)

### **Scope (Disability Information & Advice Line)**

08088003333  
[scope.org.uk](http://scope.org.uk)



**Contact us**

**Oxleas Adults' Community Greenwich Podiatry Service**

0208 320 3550

Monday – Friday

8:30am – 4:30pm

It is not always possible for us to answer the phone straight away.

Please leave a message and your call will be returned.

Please let us know if you require an interpreter or have any additional needs.