

Introductory to Foot and Ankle Specificity

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Introduction

Most people experience pain in and around their feet or ankles at some point in their lives. It's one of the most complex, hard-working regions of your body. It has 26 bones and 33 small joints, all held together by a network of soft tissue made up of muscles, tendons, ligaments, nerves, and blood vessels.

Most cases of foot or ankle pain are short term and are caused by soft tissue injuries, such as sprains or strains. These should gradually heal with the help of simple self-care measures. Though some could take a few months to fully recover, you probably won't need to seek treatment from a healthcare professional.

However, some pain can have no obvious cause or may not improve significantly with self-care. Pain that seems to be getting worse, does not improve, or lasts longer than a few months could be due to structural changes in the foot or ankle, or an underlying condition.

There can be several explanations for long-term pain in and around the feet or ankles, such as:

- badly fitting footwear
- osteoarthritis
- inflammatory arthritis
- connective tissue diseases
- poor blood circulation
- nerve damage

Most foot or ankle pain can be treated without the need to see a healthcare professional. Soft-tissue injuries should begin to improve over the first few days with the help of some simple self-care tips. You may need to be careful and protect the injured area for several months, until it has fully recovered.

Exercise can help reduce pain and stiffness in the feet and ankles. If your feet or ankles are stiff in the morning you may find it easier to

exercise once they have had time to loosen up. A warm bath or shower can help ease stiffness.

Start gently and slowly build up the amount you are doing once each exercise becomes easier or more comfortable. It's normal to feel some slight aches as you move your foot or ankle. However, if movement makes it feel worse or is causing bursts of more intense pain, stop and consult a healthcare professional.

A healthcare professional will usually make their diagnosis after examining your feet. They will look for signs of swelling and any structural changes that could be causing the pain. You may also be asked to walk about, to see whether the problem affects your movement and posture. Most of the time they can make a diagnosis without scans, x-rays or blood tests, unless they think your pain is being caused by a condition, such as arthritis.

Several types of arthritis can affect your feet and ankles. Some, such as osteoarthritis, can be managed with painkillers, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and exercises that strengthen and stretch the soft tissue around the affected joint. If your pain doesn't improve, your doctor may recommend a steroid injection into the joint to reduce the swelling and pain and get your foot and ankle moving more.

However, inflammatory conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis are likely to need disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs) or biologics. These long-term treatments should address the inflammation causing your pain.

Conflict of Interest

We have no conflict of interests to disclose and the manuscript has been read and approved by all named authors.

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