

Happy Feet (and Ankles!)

It's a fact: one quarter of your bones are located in your feet. So, when you have trouble with your feet, it can impact nearly everything you do.

What are the most common foot and ankle injuries/conditions?

Ankle sprains, fractures of the ankle or foot and Achilles tendon tears top the list of most common foot and ankle injuries. However, many conditions that cause ankle or foot pain are not the result of an injury and include ankle/foot arthritis, plantar fasciitis, Achilles tendonitis, progressive flatfoot, bunions and toe deformities (such as hammertoes). Overuse injuries such as stress fractures and tendonitis are other frequently occurring conditions that can limit mobility and cause a great deal of pain.

What risk factors can play a role in foot and ankle injuries?

Weekend warriors, or people who are likely to participate in strenuous activities and sports in their spare time, are quite often prone to foot and ankle injuries. Tight leg muscles and tendons are at risk for Achilles tendonitis, tears and plantar fasciitis, but can often be resolved—and even avoided—through proper stretching. Shoes with high heels or pointed toes can cause or worsen foot pain and even overtraining by runners and other athletes can lead to injuries in the foot and ankle.

How can I protect my feet and ankles?

The best thing you can do is to wear shoes that are the correct size and offer proper support. Most shoes have an insert that supports the arch of our foot. Some are designed for people with higher arches while others are better for individuals who may have a flatter foot. Running shoes can be helpful for people with foot pain, and very often shoe and athletic stores have specialists who can help you determine what shoe is best for you. You can protect your feet by practicing regular stretching of your lower leg and foot muscles and by considering a cross-training program (where several exercises and athletics are rotated to avoid repetitive stress on muscles and tendons).

Do the risks of foot and ankle conditions increase with age?

Oftentimes, yes. As we age, the risk of developing a foot or ankle condition rises, especially when it comes to bunions, hammertoes, progressive flatfoot and arthritis. Supportive and properly fitting shoes are key. Sometimes an orthotic (a custom insole placed in a shoe) or a brace can be helpful when it comes to managing painful conditions.

When is it time to see an expert?

After a foot or ankle injury, if you experience swelling or bruising, or if walking or standing becomes difficult or painful, it may be time to see the doctor. Sometimes foot and ankle pain can develop *even without* an actual injury. If resting, ice and over-the-counter pain relievers don't help, or if swelling, redness, warmth of the skin or weakness occur, it's absolutely time to see the doctor. And for the athletes among us, if running or other training causes pain, an appointment with a foot and ankle doctor is recommended.

What is an orthopedic foot and ankle surgeon?

Foot and ankle orthopedic surgeons are medical doctors who are trained in all aspects of orthopedic surgery (from the cervical spine down to the toes). This training includes joint replacement, arthroscopy (minimally invasive surgery), treatment of traumatic injuries and fractures and pediatric musculoskeletal conditions. They also spend an extra year concentrating on disorders and injuries of the foot and ankle. Their background allows them to fully evaluate and treat the many complex issues that can affect the feet and ankles.

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If you're experiencing foot and ankle pain, the Upper Chesapeake Orthopedic Specialty Group can help. Call 443-643-3130 or visit umuch.org/ortho for more information or to make an appointment.