

## ARTHRITIS AND THE FEET

Arthritis, characterized by inflammation and swelling of the soft tissues and lining of the joints, afflicts almost 40 million Americans. Although every joint in the body is susceptible to arthritis, the foot and its composition of 33 joints is a common target. "Arthritic feet can interfere with active lifestyles, limiting mobility and independence," says Chris Guerrieri, DPM, a Northland podiatric surgeon and member of the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons.

"The disabling effects of arthritis can often be avoided through early diagnosis and appropriate medical care."

Dr. Guerrieri stresses early diagnosis as key to effective treatment of arthritis. If the inflammation of arthritic disease isn't treated, both soft tissue and cartilage can be damaged and destruction of the cartilage may be irreversible.

Arthritic symptoms generally include swelling and pain or tenderness in one or more joints for more than two weeks, redness or heat in a joint, limitation of joint motion, early morning stiffness, and skin changes, including rashes.

Symptoms do vary according to the form of arthritis and there are more than 100 different forms. Each form affects the body differently. Among the most recognized forms are:

- Osteoarthritis or degenerative joint disease (wear and tear), the most common form
- Rheumatoid arthritis, a complex, chronic inflammatory disease that can be crippling
- Gouty arthritis, a condition caused by elevation of uric acid levels – sometimes a by-product of diet – in the joints
- Septic arthritis is caused spread of bacteria to a joint through the bloodstream.
- Psoriatic arthritis, an inflammatory arthritis associated with psoriasis.

"Most forms of arthritis cannot be cured, but can be controlled," says Dr. James Good, also a Northland podiatric foot and ankle surgeon. "Arthritis treatment involves controlling inflammation and preserving joint function. Surgery may be indicated in end-stage arthritic conditions."

Traditional treatment methods include anti-inflammatories, pain medication, shoe inserts called orthoses that help with off-loading the joints affected, and physical therapy and exercise.

In addition to the traditional treatments, Dr. Good points out that there are new advancements in treatment for arthritis. A new class of anti-inflammatories has been introduced that is as effective as those currently available, but has fewer side effects such as gastrointestinal distress.

For an appointment with Dr. Guerrieri or Dr. Good in either their Gladstone or Liberty location, call 816-453-5161. Evening appointments are available.