



There are two primary types of arthritides affecting New Zealanders - osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. Osteoarthritis (OA) is a degenerative arthritis, often referred to as the “wear and tear” arthritis that occurs after years of using your bones and joints.

Osteoarthritis

In osteoarthritis, the cartilage that covers the ends of our bones is worn down. Healthy cartilage helps the bones absorb shock, acting as a rubber-like cushion. It creates a slippery surface on the bone ends so the bones can move smoothly past one another when a joint is flexed or extended, instead of rubbing against each other or other tissues.

As the cartilage is worn down, bones start to rub against one another. This causes pain, limits movement capability, and means the shape of the joint can become distorted - further limiting the ability to move the joints. Ultimately, osteoarthritic joints can become very stiff and immobile, leading to a great deal of pain and frustration for those affected.

What are the symptoms?

Not all osteoarthritic changes are symptomatic. The damage to the bones from osteoarthritis will worsen over time, unless action is taken to stop it or slow down the progression. You may experience:

- Joint pain
- Swelling
- Redness
- Restrictions in movement
- Creaking in the joints
- Changes to the bone shape and bone spur formation, identified by x-ray

What causes osteoarthritis?

The term ‘wear and tear’ that is often associated with osteoarthritis refers to the loads that we put on the joints during our lifetime that cause them to wear down. This is particularly true for repetitive movements that stress the joints, like in running. Aside from this, other contributing factors include:

- Previous injury to the bones or joints
- Obesity
- Infection
- Repetitive movements at work

Managing osteoarthritis at home

While the degenerative changes to the cartilage from arthritis are irreversible, they can be managed to reduce the symptoms and improve your comfort and mobility. You can also reduce the rate of progression of osteoarthritis. Self-management includes:

- Wearing comfortable, cushioned shoes that help your bones absorb shock
- Avoiding activities that cause direct joint pain as much as possible
- Medically managing symptoms in accordance with your GP

How your Podiatrist can help

As the experts in lower limb health, your Podiatrist will create a tailored plan to help you effectively manage your symptoms and slow down the progression of your OA. This may include:

- Using **orthotics** to offload pressure away from affected joints, thereby alleviating painful symptoms
- Advising on the **best-suited footwear** for OA management

- A **strengthening and stretching programme** to maintain the strength and flexibility of the muscles around the affected joints
- Showing you **alternate movements or techniques** to reduce the progression of your OA
- Some Podiatrists are trained in **innovative treatments** like protein-rich plasma (PRP) injections, amino neuro frequency (ANF) therapy and other therapies that have shown positive results in managing the symptoms of OA

Need a trusted Podiatrist in your area? Click [here](#).

Disclaimer: This document is an informative guide only and is not a tool for diagnosis or management of arthritis. Podiatrists play an important role in the effective management of arthritis in the lower limbs, but cannot diagnose arthritis. You must see your primary physician to receive an accurate diagnosis. Referrals are not required to see your Podiatrist.