

FOOT NOTES

THE NEWSLETTER FOR SPRINGFIELD PODIATRY AND ACCURATE FOOT & DIABETIC CARE

March, 2022 Edition

PAIN IN THE GREAT TOE JOINT:

As Spring approaches, we think of getting outside and walking for exercise after being shut in during the long, cold winter months. But one common problem we often encounter that can prohibit our strolls in nature is pain in the joint at the base of the great toe. With this condition, there is aching and stiffness of the joint, sometimes with intermittent sharp, stabbing pain. These symptoms tend to be worse when pushing off the great toe during walking. You may see some thickening of the joint due to bone spur formation and/or some swelling of the joint.

So, what is causing these symptoms? Arthritis. Typically, the symptoms I have described are caused by degenerative joint disease, or “wear and tear arthritis”. This is often the result of repetitive trauma to the joint. While a single traumatic episode, such as a fracture that extends into the joint and damages the cartilage, may be the cause of the arthritis, this usually tends to occur from long term, repetitive microtrauma. The trauma damages the cartilage and may lead to microfractures of the bone at the joint. These microfractures heal with new bone, which, over time, produce bone spur formation at the joint to limit motion. At times, the bone spurs may even pinch the joint capsule, the soft tissue surrounding the joint that keeps the joint fluid in place to lubricate the cartilage surfaces. When this occurs, it feels like a sharp, stabbing pain as well as a locking of the joint. If the cartilage at the end of each bone in the joint becomes damaged or wears away, the two ends of bone rub together to create pain and further limit motion.

This arthritic condition and stiffness where the big toe meets the foot at the first metatarsal head is called hallux limitus or hallux rigidus (hallux being the medical term for the big toe).

But have no fear! There are many ways to reduce the pain and stiffness of this condition, slow the progression of the arthritis, and keep you on the go! For mild discomfort, a topical pain reliever, such as Voltaren gel, Aspercreme or a CBD oil or gel may help to alleviate the joint tenderness. Sometimes, if the joint is acutely inflamed, an oral medication such as Advil or Aleve may reduce the inflammation, pain and swelling. For severe joint flare ups, or when the inside of the joint capsule is pinched by the bones (as described above), we may inject the joint with a small amount of steroid to quickly calm the inflammation and shrink the swollen, pinched capsule. For stubborn joint pain and inflammation, our Class 4 laser therapy successfully reduces the pain, swelling and inflammation while simultaneously relaxing the surrounding muscles that involuntarily contract to prevent motion at the painful joint.

Another factor we address is the mechanics of your feet. Oftentimes, the first metatarsal elevates which lowers the arch when someone bears weight. This causes jamming at the big toe joint with every step, leading to chronic microtrauma and arthritis. In these cases, an arch support (or orthotic) will improve the mechanics of the feet to reduce the abnormal stresses on the joint. This can greatly slow the progression of the arthritis.

What if all these conservative treatments fail? In these cases, surgery may be necessary. For mild arthritis with bone spurs but little to no cartilage damage, simply removing the spurs is beneficial. We use a minimal incision approach to allow for quick healing. For more moderate cases, there is an implanted joint spacer called a Cartiva implant. In more severe cases, a total joint implant with a hinge for motion (Swanson total joint implant) is very successful at restoring motion and eliminating pain. And for the most severe cases, a joint fusion to eliminate all motion and pain may be necessary.

So, if you have nagging pain, swelling or stiffness at the big toe joint, don't just ignore it and hope it will go away. Talk to us about your symptoms so we can discuss the best options to keep you pain free and on your feet!

ANNOUNCEMENT

Our annual Shoe Drive started in November and runs through March 31, 2022. Please drop off your new or gently used shoes, boots, sandals and slippers to either office to help those in need. Thank you for your continued support!

PERSONALLY SPEAKING

We would like to welcome a new staff member to our West Chester office! Margaret (Peggy) Sherman, one of our new Medical Receptionists, is a mother of 4 and a grandmother of 9. She was married on April 9, 2020 during the COVID pandemic, so the ceremony was virtual with 175 guests! Peggy enjoys traveling to warm places with beautiful beaches and crystal blue water. She is an avid softball player and had a Labradoodle named Princess. Please be sure to say hello to Peggy at your next visit.

MYTH BUSTERS

“Arthritis is just an old person's disease and is a natural part of aging, so there is nothing you can do about it.” Not true! While our joints do suffer from normal “wear and tear” as we discussed above, not everyone develops arthritis. Furthermore, other treatable conditions, such as tendonitis, ligament strains and bursitis can cause joint pain, so don't ignore it as a “natural part of aging”.

FUN FACTS

Not really a FUN fact, but over 300,000 children in the US are affected by some sort of joint disease, 50,000 of which have Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA), the most common form of pediatric arthritis.

WHAT'S NEW

We have available in our office amnion injections for pain, inflammation, and tissue injury. Amnion is a fluid human graft derived from the amnionic fluid of the placenta of carefully screened women undergoing C-Sections. These injections can help to heal various soft tissue injuries, including conditions such as plantar fasciitis, tendonitis, bursitis, and arthritis. Ask the doctors about this treatment option at your next visit!

QUOTES

“Our life is March weather, savage and serene in one hour.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

PUNNY STUFF

Cows have hooves because they lactose.

PUZZLE:

Call today for your foot health evaluation!

In Drexel Hill, call 484-459-5954

(springfieldpodiatry@springpod.comcastbiz.net)

In West Chester, call 610-436-5883

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Or visit us at www.drsiegerman.com

Dr. Julie Siegerman and Dr. Siavash Rostami

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