

Centre for the Rheumatoid Foot & Ankle

The Centre of the Rheumatoid Foot & Ankle at COFAC is dedicated to evaluating and treating foot and ankle problems in individuals with rheumatoid arthritis.

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease. This means that the immune system attacks its own tissues. In rheumatoid arthritis, the defenses that protect the body from infection instead damage normal tissue (such as cartilage and ligaments) and soften bone.

How It Happens

The joints of your body are covered with a lining called synovium that lubricates the joint and makes it easier to move. Rheumatoid arthritis causes an over activity of this lining. It swells and becomes inflamed, destroying the joint, as well as the ligaments and other tissues that support it. Weakened ligaments can cause joint deformities such as claw toe or hammer toe. Softening of the bone (osteopenia) can result in stress fractures and collapse of bone.

Rheumatoid arthritis is not an isolated disease of the bones and joints. It affects tissues throughout the body, causing damage to the blood vessels, nerves, and tendons. Deformities of the hands and feet are the more obvious signs of RA. In about 20% of patients, foot and ankle symptoms are the first signs of the disease.

Although there is no cure for RA, there are many treatment options available to help people manage pain, stay active, and live fulfilling lives.

Rheumatoid arthritis is often treated by a team of healthcare professionals. These professionals may include rheumatologists, physical and occupational therapists, social workers, rehabilitation specialists, and orthopaedic surgeons.

Although orthopaedic treatment may relieve symptoms, it will not stop the progression of the disease. Specific medicines called disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs are designed to stop the immune system from destroying the joints. The appropriate use of these medications is directed by a rheumatologist.

Orthopaedic treatment of RA depends on the location of the pain and the extent of cartilage damage. Many patients will have some symptom relief with appropriate nonsurgical treatment.