

Ankle Arthritis

Non-Operative Versus Operative
Management
CU Orthopedic Surgery - Foot & Ankle

Non-operative Management

There are a variety of non-operative treatments that may prove helpful in managing ankle arthritis. A combination of these treatment strategies often works best. Each patient will be the best judge of which treatments work and one often has to try a variety of combinations to see what works best.

Each treatment is designed to do one or more of the following:

- Limit the force going through the ankle joint;
- Limit the movement through the ankle joint
- Minimize the pain response.

Non-operative treatments may include:

Shoes: A stiff sole shoe with a rocker-bottom contour can absorb shock on impact and help with weight transfer during walking.

Ankle Braces: These can range from a lace-up brace to a medical walking boot to a custom brace. All are designed to limit ankle motion.

Cushioned shock absorbing orthotic: A soft shock-absorbing over-the-counter orthotic or heel cushion like a visco heel (silicone) or memory foam insert may help to absorb some of the force that would normally go through the ankle with each step and helps spread out stress from ankle during walking.

Cane: Used in the opposite hand (cane goes in the left hand if your right ankle has arthritis) a cane will decrease the force that is felt through the ankle joint with walking. It also improves balance which can make walking easier

Weight Loss: Each 5 lbs of weight loss lessens ankle joint stress by 10-15 lbs/step.

Physical Therapy or Home exercise programs: Exercises designed to keep the joints from getting stiff and keeping muscles that control the ankle strong can be helpful. Therapists can also often suggest ways to perform activities that are less stressful to the ankle.

Activity modification: Find creative ways to lessen standing/steps or exercise triggers which cause more joint pain.

Anti-Inflammatory Medication (NSAIDs): Ibuprofen, Naprosyn, and others, both over the counter and by prescription, may be helpful. Used on cyclic basis NSAIDs can help joint pain and includes oral and topical NSAID agents. (Discuss with your physician before starting)

Acetaminophen (ex. Tylenol): Can also provide pain relief, but patients with liver problems should avoid this medication and it is important to take only the amount instructed.

Corticosteroid Injections: Reduces the inflammation/pain ankle arthritis. Can be effective for 3-6 months.

Operative Management

After a patient has attempted non-operative management for an extended period of time, it is appropriate to discuss surgical intervention. Surgical intervention can include a variety of procedures ultimately tailored around the patient goals and interest while considering their past medical history.

Operative management for ankle arthritis can include some of the following procedures:

- Ankle cheilectomy: removal of a bony prominence at the level of the ankle joint, typically the least invasive
- Ankle arthrodesis: fusion of the ankle
- Total ankle arthroplasty: total ankle replacement using metal and plastic implant

Treatment for each patient is unique and based upon their symptoms, clinical exam findings, and ultimately their desired outcomes.

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