



GARNET ORTHOPEDIC
SOLUTIONS



PATIENT EDUCATION GUIDE

Understanding Osteoarthritis and Keeping Your Feet Moving

A practical guide to how osteoarthritis develops in the foot, what puts you at risk, and how a personalized plan can help you manage pain while staying active for years to come.

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SECTION 01

What Is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis, affecting roughly 13 percent of Canadian adults. In the foot, it shows up most often in the midfoot joints and at the base of the big toe, known as the first metatarsophalangeal joint, and a number of studies point to custom foot orthoses and orthopedic footwear as an effective part of a midfoot osteoarthritis treatment plan.

The Arthritis Society of Canada describes osteoarthritis as "the result of the body's failed attempt to repair damaged joint tissue." That damage can come from a traumatic injury or build up gradually from a mix of other factors. Every joint in the body relies on a layer of protective cartilage covering the ends of the bones; over time, mechanical stress, age, and other influences wear that cartilage down, until the joint is left with bone moving against bone. That is what produces the stiffness, discomfort, and pain associated with the condition.

Why some joints and not others

One of the more frustrating aspects of osteoarthritis is that there is currently no clear explanation for why certain midfoot joints degenerate while neighboring joints in the same foot stay unaffected. This unpredictability is part of why an individualized assessment matters so much, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to treatment.

SECTION 02

Recognizing the Symptoms

Osteoarthritis tends to announce itself gradually, and the early signs are easy to dismiss as ordinary wear and tear:

- Joint stiffness, especially after periods of rest
- Joint swelling
- Joint cracking or grinding with movement
- Pain that shows up mainly after activity at first, though it can progress to affect everyday tasks



Joint pain in osteoarthritis often starts after activity and, without support, can progress into everyday movement.

As it progresses

Left unaddressed, the symptom picture tends to broaden. People often describe:

- Persistent foot pain
- Structural changes or visible deformities
- Poorer balance, which raises the risk of falling
- A slower, more guarded walking speed
- Difficulty crossing uneven ground
- Muscle weakness around the affected joint
- Reduced range of motion
- Increased pressure through parts of the foot during walking
- More difficulty on stairs, both ascending and descending

If any of this sounds familiar, a proper assessment is the fastest way to understand what is actually happening in your foot and what to do about it.

[Book an Assessment](#)

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SECTION 03

Where OA Affects the Foot

Osteoarthritis in the foot is not evenly distributed. The midfoot joints and the joint at the base of the big toe carry a disproportionate share of cases, which makes sense given how much load passes through those structures with every step you take. When those joints degenerate, the effect on gait is rarely limited to the foot itself; a stiffer, more painful midfoot changes how weight travels up through the ankle, knee, and hip, and over time that altered pattern can create secondary strain elsewhere in the body.



Mobility support, from a cane to a properly designed orthotic, helps protect the rest of the kinetic chain as the foot compensates.

A moving target

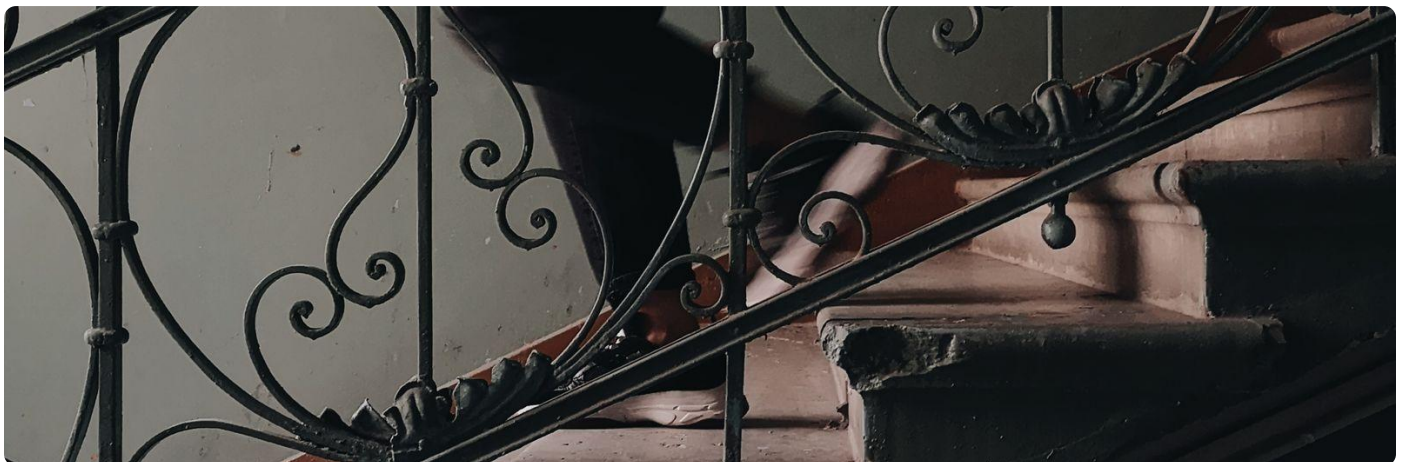
Because osteoarthritis can manifest differently from one person to the next, and even from one foot to the other in the same person, the goal of an assessment is not to apply a generic protocol. It is to map out exactly which joints are involved, how far the condition has progressed, and how your particular gait is compensating, so that any brace, footwear change, or orthotic actually targets the right structures.

SECTION 04

Risk Factors Worth Knowing

Osteoarthritis can affect anyone, but certain factors make it more likely to develop, and understanding your own risk profile is a useful starting point for prevention:

- Age: risk increases the older you get
- Sex: research suggests osteoarthritis is more prevalent in women
- Excess weight: added weight increases pressure through the joints of the foot, and that mechanical stress raises the risk of developing OA
- Joint injury: repetitive stress or a traumatic injury can accelerate joint degeneration



Difficulty with stairs is often one of the first everyday signs that a joint is losing range of motion.

What tends to make symptoms worse

Because osteoarthritis has a multifactorial onset, avoiding it altogether is difficult, but a handful of avoidable aggravators show up again and again:

- Ill-fitting footwear
- High impact exercise
- Excessive weight gain
- Any activity or motion that reliably increases your pain

Giving an injury proper time to rehabilitate before returning to sport or a demanding activity also meaningfully lowers the risk of the joint degenerating further down the line.

SECTION 05

What You Can Do Today

Managing your current symptoms, activity level, and range of motion all play into your overall well-being, and none of the following require waiting for an appointment:

- Keep moving. Physical activity and maintaining muscle strength and joint mobility are central to any treatment plan; if you are not currently active, talk to your medical professional about what modifications or restrictions make sense for you
- Pay attention to your own patterns. Notice which motions increase stress and pain in the joint, and adjust how you move to protect it
- Take a hard look at your footwear. Are your current shoes actually comfortable, or is it time to replace them? A pedorthist can recommend footwear that improves comfort, eases symptoms, and accommodates orthoses if those become part of your plan

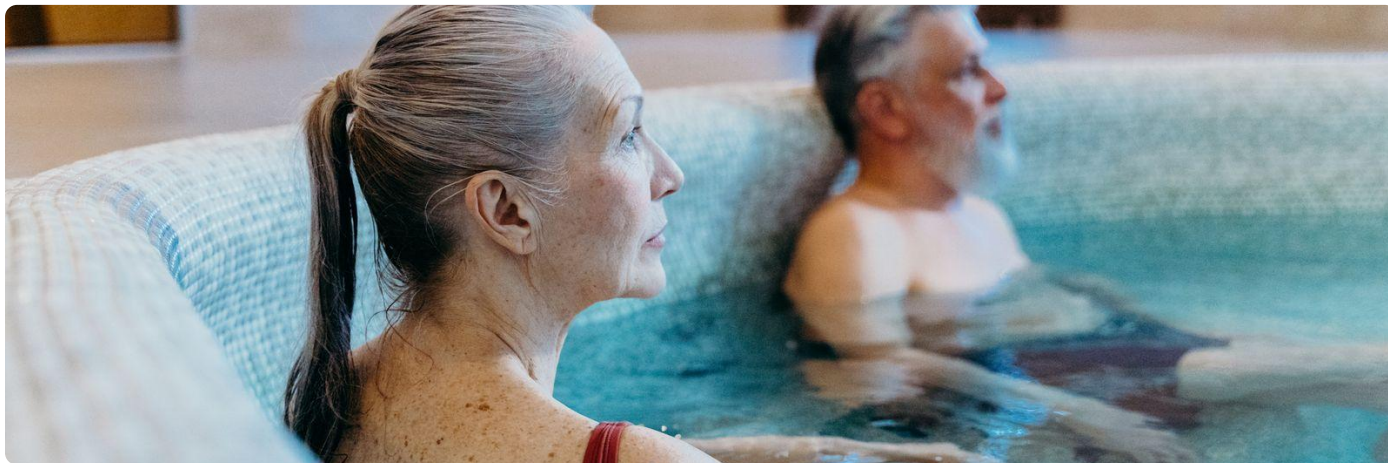


Everyday activities do not need to stop, they may just need small modifications to protect the joint.

SECTION 06

Staying Active With Osteoarthritis

Treatment for osteoarthritis has two central goals: managing pain and improving your ability to function day to day. It may feel counterintuitive, but staying physically active, rather than resting the joint into stiffness, is now understood as key to managing the condition's progression. A consistent exercise routine helps retain muscular strength and preserves the range of motion you have, which in turn helps prevent stiffness from setting in further.



Low-impact activities like pool exercise reduce joint load while still supporting strength and mobility.

Getting the details right

Appropriate footwear for whatever activity you choose matters more than most people expect; the wrong shoe can quietly work against your exercise instead of supporting it. Listen to your body, allow adequate rest between sessions, and check in with your physician, physiotherapist, or kinesiologist before starting a new exercise program or if you have questions about your current fitness plan.

SECTION 07

Your Treatment Options

Treatment goals for osteoarthritis center on reducing pain and managing symptoms while keeping you able to complete daily activities with as much function and mobility as possible. Early intervention matters here: starting treatment sooner can help stabilize the joint and slow the disease's progression, rather than simply managing symptoms after significant damage has already occurred.

Conservative treatment options include:

- Custom foot orthoses
- Physiotherapy
- Activity modifications
- Medications
- Injections

For midfoot osteoarthritis specifically, research has pointed to custom foot orthoses and orthopedic shoes as a genuinely effective piece of the treatment plan, working alongside whatever other conservative care your physician recommends.

SECTION 08

Custom Orthotics vs. Off-the-Shelf

Drugstore insoles are inexpensive and available immediately, and for a mild, short-lived ache they can be a reasonable first try. But osteoarthritis is a structural, progressive joint condition, and a generic insole was not built with your specific joint involvement, gait pattern, or foot shape in mind.

OFF-THE-SHELF INSOLES		CUSTOM ORTHOTICS
Cost	Cheaper upfront	Often partly covered by extended health benefits
Availability	Instant, off a shelf	Made for you, ready in days, not weeks
Fit	Generic size range	Shaped to your exact foot and gait
What it does	Cushions around the problem	Redistributes load away from the affected joint
Lifespan	Wears out, replace often	Built to last, and adjustable as your condition changes

Your joints carry you through every day. They deserve support built for the way you actually move, not a shelf.

Custom foot orthoses are one of the most evidence-backed conservative options for midfoot osteoarthritis. Learn more about how ours are made.

See Custom Orthotics

SECTION 09

What to Expect at Garnet

Your Garnet pedorthist builds an individualized treatment plan around your specific needs, goals, and symptoms rather than a standard protocol. That starts with a thorough, comprehensive foot examination at your first appointment, where we look closely at which joints are affected, how far the condition has progressed, and how it is currently changing the way you walk.

A follow-up exam then confirms whether your plan is actually working, so adjustments happen early rather than months down the line. Where gait plays a meaningful role in how your osteoarthritis is progressing, a full gait analysis helps pinpoint exactly where your foot is under strain and why.

Curious what a gait analysis actually involves before you book?

[Learn About Gait Analysis](#)

[Book Now](#)

SECTION 10

Prevention and Long-Term Joint Health

Because osteoarthritis has so many contributing factors and shows up differently from person to person, there is little research pointing to a guaranteed way to prevent it outright. What the evidence does support is a set of steps that can meaningfully slow its progression once it has started, or reduce your odds of developing it in the first place:

- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Select and wear appropriate footwear for your activities
- Make activity modifications where needed rather than pushing through pain
- Keep up a regular exercise program that maintains your current joint range of motion
- Use custom foot orthoses where they are appropriate for your foot and gait

The earlier these habits are in place, the more range of motion and function you tend to retain over the long run.

Ready to talk to a pedorthist?

Book a consultation and get a treatment plan built around your specific joints, gait, and goals.

[Book an Appointment](#)

Garnet Orthopedic Solutions provides pedorthic assessment, custom orthotics, and footwear guidance built around each patient's specific anatomy and goals, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. Our clinic combines hands-on biomechanical assessment with practical, evidence-informed treatment, so patients leave with a plan they understand and can actually follow.

Jeff Lewis, C. Ped (C)

Canadian Certified Pedorthist

Jeff leads patient assessment and custom orthotic care at Garnet Orthopedic Solutions, working with patients to identify the root cause of their foot and lower limb pain and to build a treatment plan suited to their specific needs, goals, and symptoms.

garnetsolutions.ca | This guide is intended for general education and does not replace an individual assessment. Please consult your pedorthist or physician about your specific symptoms.

Appendix: Image Sources

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#	DESCRIPTION	PHOTOGRAPHER	SOURCE
1	Cover — senior couple with a walker in a summer park	Rollz International	pexels.com/photo/19956464
2	Sec. 2 — close-up of a woman experiencing knee pain	Kindel Media	pexels.com/photo/7298657
3	Sec. 3 — senior couple walking, one using a cane	hissetmehurriyeti	pexels.com/photo/14866317
4	Sec. 4 — person holding a railing while going down stairs	Pexels contributor	pexels.com/photo/5324419
5	Sec. 5 — senior couple gardening together outdoors	Greta Hoffman	pexels.com/photo/7728078
6	Sec. 6 — elderly woman doing low-impact exercise in a pool	cottonbro studio	pexels.com/photo/7222570

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