

Ankle Arthritis: Non-Operative Treatment

There are a variety of non-operative treatments that may prove helpful in managing the symptoms associated with ankle arthritis. A combination of these treatment strategies often works best. The patient will be the best judge of which treatments work and should be encouraged to try a variety of combinations to see what works best for them.

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:

Comfort shoes with a stiff sole and a rocker-bottom contour to disperse the force more evenly past the ankle

Ankle lacer (or boot) to limit ankle motion

Cushioned shock absorbing orthotic. A soft shock-absorbing over-the-counter orthotic may help to dissipate some of the force that would normally go through the ankle with each step.

Cane. Used in the opposite hand a cane will decrease the force that is loaded through the ankle joint with each step and may be beneficial in patients with severe ankle arthritis

Weight loss. For every 5lbs of weight loss there is 10-15 lbs less force going through the ankle joint with each step.

Physiotherapy or Home exercise programs. Exercises designed to keep the joints of the hindfoot moving and the muscles that control the ankle strong can be helpful.

Activity modification. Looking for creative ways to spend less time standing, take less steps, and avoid aggravating activities can make a big difference in symptoms.

Anti-Inflammatory Medication (NSAIDs). For those patients who can tolerate anti-inflammatory medications (younger patients without kidney or liver problems) NSAIDs may be helpful.

Actepaminophen (ex. Tylenol). Short term pain relief may be achieved. Patients with liver problems should avoid Tylenol and it is important to limit the amount that is taken.

Glucosamine Sulfate. A variety of reports have suggested that Glucosamine sulfate taken daily for a minimum of 8 weeks can improve symptoms. However, subsequent clinical trials have not shown glucosamine to be predictably effective.

Hyaluronic Acid Injections. A series of injections of this glycosaminoglycan into the ankle joint may help to decrease the symptoms of ankle arthritis in the short-term.