

Arthritis

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VOL. III NO. 3 / MAY-JUNE 1996 \$3

Ouch! If Walking Hurts...

It may not be your shoes—5 arthritis-linked problems

Got a persistent pain in your heels, toes or arches? Don't assume it's your shoes, your age or simply spending too much time on your feet. A wide variety of foot problems can be caused or aggravated by arthritis, according to **John E. Mancuso, DPM**, associate director of Manhattan Podiatry Associates, NYC. Here are the five most common arthritis-related foot problems he sees, and what can be done to improve and relieve them.

PAINFUL HEELS Inflammation in areas where tendon meets bone—which happens in the heels—is most common in rheumatoid arthritis and Reiter's syndrome. It usually causes pain in the back or bottom of the heel. The worry is that it can be misdiagnosed as Achilles tendinitis or a heel spur and lead to unnecessary surgery. The best treatment is a combination of anti-inflammatories, custom arch supports and/or heel lifts (depending on the precise pain site) plus special stretching exercises.

OVERSIZED JOINTS Enlarged foot joints, especially in the big toe, are



common with osteoarthritis. At the very least, you may need to buy shoes that are a size larger than normal. But a foot doctor can also show you how to protect prominent joints with special padding techniques and helpful footwear, such as "rocker bottom" shoes, which are designed to roll the foot forward when you take a step, rather than requiring toe joints and others to bend.

ACHY MID-FEET Many joints in the feet, but especially those in the mid-arch, are undermined by virtually all inflammatory joint diseases, particularly psoriatic arthritis, *ankylosing spondylitis* (spinal arthritis), gout, lupus and Reiter's syndrome. A foot expert can often forestall problems by supporting the arch with either a custom-tailored orthotic device or specially molded shoe.

HOT TOES Red, hot, swollen toe joints are common in gout and psoriatic arthritis. Local steroid injections can give prompt relief, and good treatment of the underlying arthritis should control the foot problem.

COLLAPSED ARCHES So-called "fallen" arches—the widening and lengthening of the foot that can occur if time and osteoporosis soften bones and weaken ligaments—can be much worse with any type of arthritis. Again, arch supports tailored to your feet can relieve discomfort and help maintain foot structure.

Finally, if foot pain is becoming a problem for you, don't get help just for that. Let the doctor who treats your arthritis know about it.

"While sometimes only the foot needs help," **Dr. Mancuso says**, "trouble there can be a signal that you need more aggressive overall arthritis treatment." □

OLD DRUG OFFERS NEW HELP FOR LUPUS

Because lupus mainly strikes women, there's suspicion that female hormones may play a role. Recently attention has focused on the hormone *prolactin*, which is thought to pump up the autoantibodies that cause all the trouble in lupus.

Could quelling prolactin help? A small study at the University of Missouri-Columbia Health Sciences Center suggests yes. A prolactin-suppressor called bromocriptine (brand name Parlodel) significantly cut down on fatigue, rashes, joint and muscle pain in almost all of those who took it for six to nine months. What's more, everyone's cholesterol levels plunged, a bonus since lupus patients are prone to heart disease. When bromocriptine was stopped, everyone's symptoms returned.

More extensive studies are planned. But bromocriptine is a relatively safe drug that's long been used to treat Parkinson's and other disorders. In the study side effects were minimal (occasional nausea, insomnia or stuffy noses). It's something your doctor could try if you have a mild form of the disease.