



International Federation of Podiatrists
Fédération Internationale des Podologues

Chronic Illnesses of the Elderly

ARTHRITIS

The two most common types of this disease that we see in the feet are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis (RA). The prevalence of RA varies between 0.3% and 1% of the population. It is seen more commonly in women than men and also more so in developed countries. Estimates from the World Health Organization (WHO) state that 9.6% of males and 18% of females, over the age of 60, are affected by osteoarthritis. Osteoarthritis is one of the 10 most disabling diseases in developed countries. The effects of these disease processes on the feet are varied. They include: digital deformities, exostosis formation, soft tissue alterations and osseous malformations. All of the above listed complications can lead to pain. Various treatment modalities exist. The treatments consist of pharmaceutical, surgical and palliative modes of care. The podiatrist should have these modes of treatment in his or her arsenal to choose from or to be used as a reference to the correct specialists.

DIABETES

There is an emerging global epidemic of diabetes mellitus (DM) in the world. It is estimated that 347 million people have DM worldwide. This epidemic can be attributed to the rapid increases in obesity/overweight and physical inactivity. The WHO projects DM to be the 7th cause of death in the world by the year 2030. Eighty percent of the deaths attributed to DM occur in low and middle income countries. In developed

countries most people with DM are above the retirement age, but in developing countries those most frequently affected are between the ages of 35-64.

As our patients live longer with DM, the risk of pedal maladies increases. Ulceration and amputation tops the list of these pedal complications. Keep in mind that approximately 75% of the pedal amputations that occur are due to a non-healing ulceration. In our elderly population, the inability to ambulate for periods of time can lead to exacerbation of other disease processes. Cardiac and peripheral vascular diseases are two examples.

PERIPHERAL ARTERIAL DISEASE

Peripheral arterial disease (PAD) refers to the pathological process of obstruction of the arteries, excluding the coronary and cerebral arteries. The prevalence of PAD increases markedly with age, smoking and diabetes. Patients with lower extremity disease have a 40% increased risk of stroke. The annual mortality rate for patients with lower extremity PAD is 4% to 6%. It has been estimated that the prevalence of lower extremity PAD is 2.5% in individuals 60 years and younger, 8.3% among those between 60-69 years and 18.8% in those 70 years and older. As podiatrists we see the sequela of PAD in the feet. It can present as an ischemic ulceration, rest pain or frank gangrene. Consultation with a vascular interventionalist is of the utmost importance in limb salvage in these cases.