

Painful foot osteoarthritis affects one in six over 50s

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New research from Keele has shown painful foot osteoarthritis to be more common than previously thought, impacting one in six UK adults over the age of 50 - more than 3.5 million. The large-scale study has shown the disease has a significant impact on the lives of people affected, such as reducing the ability to perform simple everyday tasks.

Led by Keele University's Arthritis Research UK Primary Care Centre, the study included more than 5,000 people to investigate the condition, which affects the joints and causes around one million people to visit their GP every year. Typical features include inflammation in and around the joints, damage to cartilage and swelling of the bone, causing pain, stiffness and difficulty moving.

The research found painful foot [osteoarthritis](#) affects women more than men, with the condition becoming more common in people who have spent their lives predominantly in manual work. While previous studies have focussed on purely x-ray findings, this is the first research into foot osteoarthritis to factor in pain and the impact on people's lives. Three quarters of people with painful foot osteoarthritis reported having difficulty with simple day-to-day activities such as walking, standing, housework and shopping.

The study used recently developed methods to include instances of osteoarthritis in the middle of the foot, which had been excluded from past studies because of difficulties detecting the condition at certain joints.

Dr Edward Roddy, clinical senior lecturer in rheumatology at Keele University, said: "Foot osteoarthritis is a more common and disabling problem than we previously thought, making everyday tasks difficult and painful for people affected.

"While it's been known for decades that joints in

the foot can be affected by osteoarthritis, much of the previous research has focussed on the hip and knee areas, and research into the foot has concentrated almost entirely on the 'bunion joint' at the base of the big toe. However, by looking at the whole foot and the impact on people's lives, it's clear the problem is more widespread than we anticipated.

"This is an area that needs much more research to understand the reasons why people develop osteoarthritis in their feet, and what we can do to help improve pain and suffering from this common condition. Doctors and other healthcare professionals should also be aware of osteoarthritis as a common cause of foot pain in this age group."

Professor Anthony Redmond, spokesman for Arthritis Research UK and Professor of Clinical Biomechanics at the University of Leeds said: "We know that foot problems become more common as we get older but the medical and healthcare community have been guilty in the past of dismissing this as just an inevitable part of ageing.

"We have long known about some forms of osteoarthritis in the feet such as bunions, which are a common type of osteoarthritic damage affecting the big toe joints and are taken much more seriously, with both on-surgical and surgical treatments widely employed. The study tells us that if we want to keep our over 50's active and healthy we should be similarly serious about 'arch' or midfoot pain. While osteoarthritis does not yet have a miracle cure, the associated pain and disability are not inevitable and people with [foot pain](#) should be given genuine treatment options – something can always be done."

Provided by Keele University

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