

Charcot Foot

Information for patients



Podiatry Department

What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet is about a neurological condition called Charcot Neuropathic Osteoarthropathy, commonly referred to as Charcot foot.

What is Charcot Foot?

Charcot foot is a serious and progressive condition that can affect the feet in people with neuropathy (nerve damage with numbness). This is when the bones of the foot become very fragile and start to dislocate or break in response to very minor forces – even just standing or walking.

What causes Charcot Foot?

The most common cause is diabetes however, it can occur in people who have different causes of nerve damage.

Signs and symptoms

The early signs are inflammation (swelling, heat and redness) of the foot and ankle. This can often be mistaken for a sprain or infection. It can be initiated by trauma but often starts for no obvious reason. Due to nerve damage there is often no pain but occasionally there can be some aching or discomfort.

Diagnosis

An x-ray or MRI scan will show damage or inflammation of the bones. A simple non-invasive test will show if there is nerve damage. Blood tests can diagnose diabetes or help find another cause of your nerve damage.

Treatments available

The aim of treating Charcot Foot is to prevent foot deformity. A cast will reduce movement and you will be asked to rest until the inflammation has settled. You will be given regular appointments to change the cast and monitor your foot temperature until the inflammation has settled. You may need to have follow-up x-rays to check for any further damage. A removable cast is then given. The treatment can take several months. In some cases it can take a year or more before it settles and the bones regain their strength.

Side effects of treatment

Occasionally you can experience rubbing of the skin from the plaster cast, but this will be regularly checked.

What will happen without treatment?

Without treatment you will damage the bones in your foot which will lead to serious foot deformity. Foot deformity can lead to ulcerations, where the skin breaks down and can become infected. In rare cases it can lead to amputation.

What can I do to help myself?

You should follow the medical advice and keep your weight off your foot as much as possible. You should also keep checking your other foot as the increase in pressure on it may lead to further problems.

Care at home afterwards

You will need a waterproof device to keep your cast dry in the shower. This can be purchased from your chemist or online. You may also need crutches depending on your mobility level.

Follow-up care

If your foot has changed shape you may need prescription footwear from the Orthotics Department as it will be difficult to fit in to ordinary pre-made footwear. Your bespoke footwear will protect your foot from developing ulcers in high pressure areas.

Nerve damage and foot deformity means that you will be at greater risk of foot ulcerations. You will be given regular appointments with the Podiatry Department for ongoing monitoring and treatment to reduce this risk.



We encourage you to discuss any questions or concerns that you may have with your Podiatrist.

Please keep the contact details for your Podiatry Clinic safe:

St John's Hospital - 01506 523 175

Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh - 0131 242 1453