

# UNDERSTANDING JOINT PAIN SYMPTOMS & WHEN YOU NEED TO SEE THE DOCTOR

## TRAUMA, FALL, FRACTURE:

**TRAUMA:** Any time there is trauma (fall, impact, car accident) along with pain, a bone or joint could have fractured. X-rays will be needed to check for broken bones. See an orthopedic specialist or an Emergency Room.

## HAND:

**NUMBNESS/WEAKNESS IN ARM / HAND:** Numbness or weakness in the arm or hand can be an emergency symptom related to a herniated disc in the neck. Left untreated, the symptom can become permanent. You should see a spine specialist within 3 days.

## SHOULDER:

**FROZEN SHOULDER** can develop from overuse or inflammation.  
**BURSITIS** can make it difficult to raise the arm with twinges of pain.  
**TENDONITIS** is inflammation of the tendon which connects muscle to bone. Self care for all three can include anti-inflammatories and R-I-C-E: Rest, Ice, Compression & Elevation. Rest your shoulder for a day or so, using ice for 10 minutes at a time. Compress the shoulder snugly with an elastic band (not tightly) and lie down with the shoulder elevated. An orthopedic surgeon can provide a steroid injection to improve motion and relieve pain.

**NUMB FINGERS:** Numbness in the tips of the fingers can relate to Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. Watchful waiting with the use of a brace can be tried for a couple months. Numbness, if ignored over several months, can become permanent and lifelong, along with weakness in grip. Treatment can include a 30-minute surgery to relieve the tightness in the wrist.

## KNEE:

**TORN ACL:** A torn anterior cruciate ligament can involve an audible "pop" followed by a feeling of nausea and instability. A complete ACL tear will require surgery where a new ligament is harvested from the hamstring or patellar tendon.  
**BURSITIS** can cause inflammation of the "bursae" in the joint resulting in pain upon movement.  
**SHIN SPLINTS** involve pain on the lower leg following exercise or stress.  
**DISLOCATION** occurs with an injury or fall moving the knee "out of joint."  
**TORN MENISCUS** can be caused by an injury during activity.  
**ARTHRITIC KNEE** can be common with age and can worsen when the person is overweight or obese. Long term treatment may include knee replacement. Self care for many knee pain ailments can include anti-inflammatories and ice. An orthopedic surgeon can provide a knee injection to relieve pain, or drain the knee of excess accumulated fluid in the knee. A person should see an orthopedic surgeon for a complete evaluation to determine the cause of knee pain.

## HIP:

**HIP PAIN** not linked to dislocation due to trauma, fall or car accident, is often linked to bursitis (inflammation of the joint) or degeneration of the hip joint due to arthritis which damages the surface of the top of the thigh bone and the socket within the pelvis.

- Self care for hip joint pain can include: anti-inflammatories; rest; ice or heat; and physical therapy.
- Visit an orthopedic surgeon for a thorough evaluation for the cause of your hip joint pain and treatment options. You should see a doctor when you have a hip joint that appears deformed, if you are unable to move your leg or hip, or bear weight on the leg.
- Long term treatment for an arthritic hip joint is hip joint replacement through artificial hip replacement or mini hip replacement. Hip replacement is often delayed where possible to minimize the likelihood of the patient outliving the artificial joint which would require a complex revision surgery and a second artificial joint surgery.

**ANKLE PAIN** at the back of the leg above the ankle can be related to a sprained or ruptured Achilles tendon, which can be accompanied by a pop while performing an activity, followed by intense pain and impaired ability to walk. A torn Achilles tendon may require surgery.  
**ANKLE SWELLING** following activity or awkward landing on the ankle can relate to a sprained ankle. If the swelling and pain does not self resolve over several days, an orthopedic surgeon should evaluate the ankle. Other persistent ankle joint pain can be caused by arthritis.  
**PAIN IN THE HEEL** is often plantar fasciitis and may require an orthopedic surgeon evaluation & treatment.  
**PAIN IN THE BIG TOE JOINT** can be caused by a bunion (bone spur) that causes a deformed and painful toe joint. Surgery may be required to remove the bunion.

## ANKLE:

## FOOT:

**NUMBNESS/WEAKNESS IN LEG OR FOOT:** Numbness or weakness in the leg or foot can be an emergency symptom related to a herniated disc in the back. Left untreated, the symptom can become permanent. You should see a spine specialist within 3 days.