

Baystate  Franklin Medical Center

HEALTH BEAT



Feet *Our extraordinary foundations*

From a pure design standpoint, our feet are remarkable structures. Strong and stable when they need to be, flexible when that is required, they do their best to carry us around.

Between the two of them, our feet contain one quarter of the bones in our entire body. Of course, many of these bones are on the smaller side, which only adds to the complexity of these firm yet supple foundations of ours. It also increases the challenge for orthopedic surgeons who specialize in foot and ankle surgery, giving them that many more possibilities to consider.

Because he welcomed just such a challenge, Dr. Brian Hoffman, of Baystate Medical Practices - Valley Orthopedic Surgery and Sports Medicine, completed an orthopedic fellowship in foot and ankle surgery at Duke University. Having trained there with two of the leaders in the field of total ankle replacement, he recently introduced this surgery at Baystate Franklin Medical Center. "It's a great option for us to be able to offer patients," he said, "and like every other surgical decision, needs to be evaluated in terms of the patient's specific condition, age, lifestyle, and other health factors."

As surgeons, Dr. Hoffman and his practice partner, Dr. Jeremy Stevens, specialize in determining exactly what the best approach would be to managing an orthopedic injury or degenerative condition. "We can classify foot and ankle problems into three broad categories," explained Dr. Hoffman: "Inflammation – from conditions such as arthritis or plantar fasciitis; misalignment that may be caused by bunions, flatfeet, or other structural issues; and trauma. Many of these problems are managed conservatively, at least at first – including the use of anti-inflammatory medications, stretching, and physical therapy. Our role is then to figure out if or when surgery should be considered."



Dr. Brian Hoffman, with a model of the foot, including plates used to fix broken bones.

One of the great puzzles of the foot, acknowledged Dr. Hoffman, is that it does so well on the arthritis front, compared to hips and knees. "We all know people who've had hip replacements and knee surgeries to address arthritis in these major joints," he said, "yet foot and ankle cartilage, which bears even more weight and stress, does comparatively well. Consider that with each step we take, the force of 2-3 times our total body weight goes through the bones, ligaments, tendons and tissue of our feet. And still they keep pushing us along – which is why I am so fascinated with this subspecialty."

Dr. Hoffman clearly enjoys what he does for work. And though he spends a fair portion of his time in the operating room, he is quick to note that he and Dr. Stevens often talk with their patients about many of the same issues their primary care doctors do. "Patients who are overweight are likely to have more joint problems, for instance," he noted. "Those with diabetes may have problems with peripheral neuropathy; and women who have gone through menopause may be more at risk for fractures due to osteoporosis, as are patients who smoke. So we address these issues, as well."

Getting back to the three categories of major foot and ankle problems – inflammation, misalignment and trauma – Dr. Hoffman recommends the 2-week guideline for the first two, and immediate attention to trauma, especially when there is swelling and bruising. "Many conditions will get better on their own, or with at-home remedies such as rest and over-the-counter medications," he said, adding that when patients are

concerned about a sudden flare-up of pain or discomfort, their best first stop is their primary care provider's office. "If pain persists longer than a couple of weeks, or if the person's primary doctor determines that it's time for an orthopedic evaluation, then we are happy to take it from there."

Surgical expertise, from the routine to the highly complex.

For a referral to a Baystate Franklin surgeon, call Baystate Health Link at 773-2454.



**Baystate
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