



## Synopsis

# Gait Rehabilitation for Early rheumatoid Arthritis Trial (GREAT): lessons learnt from a mixed-methods feasibility study and internal pilot trial

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## Plain language summary

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### Why did we do this research?

Foot and ankle problems in people with rheumatoid arthritis can cause difficulty walking. It is unclear if starting exercise-based treatments earlier, close to diagnosis, would improve walking. We aimed to compare a new set of walking exercises, delivered by trained podiatrists or physiotherapists for home use, with usual care, which typically starts much later in the disease.

### What did we do?

We developed a walking exercise programme with input from people with rheumatoid arthritis, National Health Service physiotherapists and podiatrists. Between June 2018 and March 2019, we recruited 35 participants with early rheumatoid arthritis, within 2 years of diagnosis, to test the programme and refine it before a trial. After finding the programme generally acceptable, we planned to compare it to usual care by randomly assigning participants to either the new intervention or their regular treatment. We monitored lower limb function and health outcomes over 6 months.

### What did we find?

Both patients and clinicians found the programme acceptable and feasible. Clinicians were able to deliver it as expected after training. Unfortunately, coronavirus disease 2019 delayed the study, and post-coronavirus disease approval times were slower. We also faced challenges recruiting participants with both early rheumatoid arthritis and foot/ankle issues. As a result, the study ended early before we could evaluate the programme's effectiveness.

### What does this mean for people with early rheumatoid arthritis?

Early intervention with walking exercises can be successfully delivered by physiotherapists and podiatrists. Patients and clinicians found the programme acceptable and feasible. However, a full trial comparing this new exercise programme with usual care is still needed to determine its effectiveness.