

Pain Free Feet



Your Guide to
Reducing the Risk of
Foot Pain



H2 HEALTH

How much time do you spend on your feet a day? Whether you're waiting tables, or working a desk job, the answer is still most likely "a good amount of time."

Day after day, our feet take quite a beating, which is why it is so important to take extra care of them, and not to neglect them with ill-fitting shoes, high heels, and flip-flops.

Credit: [Markusram](#)

It doesn't matter if you're a marathon runner, or an occasional walker, the demands made on your feet and lower limbs can lead to a range of injuries including:



- Blisters
- Sprained ankles
- Torn ligaments
- Shin splints
- Knee pain
- Low back pain
- Heel pain
- Arch pain
- Many other joint and muscle problems.

The key to healthy feet is **prevention** or early detection. By arming yourself with knowledge, you can improve the chances of keeping your feet pain free.

Wear proper footwear

One of the most crucial aspects to preventing foot pain is by wearing proper footwear. Yet, this key to prevention is often ignored or disregarded. People will buy ill-fitting shoes for many reasons, including price, look, fashion etc.

But considering how much of our time is spent on our feet, it would definitely be wise to reconsider exactly what we are putting on them.



Here are some tips on how to find proper fitting shoes:

1. Try on shoes in the late afternoon or end of the day, as feet tend to grow in size as the day progresses.

2. Wear the type of sock you will generally wear with the shoe you are trying on. (If you're trying on a running shoe, wear your running socks. If it's a work shoe, wear work socks.)
3. Bend the front part of the shoe upwards. It should bend in the toe area. If the shoe bends in the area of the laces or mid-foot, it is excessively flexible.
4. Squeeze the heel counter (at the back of the shoe) to check for firmness. It should be firm and difficult to pinch since it stabilizes and prevents slippage at the heel.
5. There should be approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of space between the end of your longest toe and the end of the toe area.
6. Many people have two different sized feet. Try both shoes on, and always buy the size based on the larger foot.

Important: When purchasing shoes, you should know the type of foot you have (whether you have flat feet, high arches, or neutral feet).

For example, a **flat-footed** person needs a motion control shoe, which is a stiffer, less flexible shoe, and helps to decrease the excess forefoot motion seen with this type of foot.

On the other hand, someone with **high arches** needs a well-cushioned shoe to improve shock absorption since this person has a more rigid, and less forgiving foot.

It is also important to look at wear patterns (A normal wear pattern would be on the back outside heel on your former shoes. This will determine whether you **pronate** or **supinate***).

* Supination and pronation describe how your heel moves during when your foot strikes the ground.

Some things to keep in mind:



- **Feet change** as you get older. Buy shoes based on an accurate foot length and width - and not simply the size you bought last time.
- Shoes with laces will give a **better fit** than slip-ons.
- **For running shoes:** you should never have to “break them in.” They should be comfortable as soon as you try them on.
- If your footwear is causing discomfort, **stop** wearing those shoes and find a better option.

Common chronic foot conditions

Knowing what kind of conditions can affect your feet is a good way to be aware of what to look out for. Here is a list of some common chronic foot conditions, prevention tips, and what to do if you are suffering from one.

1) **Plantar Fasciitis** is inflammation of the thick tissue on the bottom of the foot. This tissue is called the plantar fascia. It connects the heel bone to the toes and creates the arch of the foot.

- **Risk Factors**

- Foot arch problems (both flat feet and high arches)
- Obesity or sudden weight gain
- Long-distance running, especially running downhill or on uneven surfaces
- Shoes with poor arch support or soft soles

- **Symptoms**

- Pain and stiffness in the bottom of the heel and along the arch of the foot.
- The heel and foot pain may be dull or sharp. The bottom of the foot may also ache or burn.
- **The pain is usually worse:**
 - In the morning when you take your first steps.
 - After standing or sitting for a while.
 - When climbing stairs.
 - After intense activity.

- **Treatment**

- Typical treatment consists of **resting**, **icing** up to 6 times a day for 10 minutes, and **anti-inflammatory** medication.
- Wear good shoes.
- Calf, hamstring and plantar fascia stretches.
- **Physical therapy**. If typical treatment is not successful, talk to your therapist about beginning a rehabilitation program.

2) **Achilles Tendonitis** is when the Achilles tendon becomes swollen, inflamed, and painful at the heel. The Achilles tendon connects your calf muscles to your heel bone. It is used for walking, running, and jumping.

- **Risk Factors**

- If you suddenly increase the amount or intensity of an activity.
- If your calf muscles are very tight (not stretched out).

- **Symptoms**

- Pain in the heel and along the tendon when walking or running. May also experience stiffness in the morning.

- The tendon may be painful to touch or move.
- The skin over the tendon may be swollen and warm.

- **Prevention** is very important in this condition. Maintaining strength and flexibility in the muscles of the lower extremity will help reduce the risk of tendinitis.

- **Treatment**
 - **Icing** the area of discomfort for 10 minutes, up to 6 times a day, will help alleviate pain.
 - **Rest.** Do not run when your tendon is inflamed.
 - **Stretching.** As with prevention, stretching your calves and hamstrings will help take stress off your tendon.
 - **Physical Therapy.** Talk to a physical therapist about a strengthening routine.

3) **Flat Feet** is a condition in which the foot does not have a normal arch when standing.

- **Causes**
 - Flat feet are a common condition. In infants and toddlers, they are normal.

- Flat feet occur because the tissues holding the joints in the foot together are loose.
- Aging, injuries, or illness may harm the tendons and ligaments causing flat feet to develop in a person who has already formed arches.
- **Symptoms**
 - At times, foot pain, ankle pain, or lower leg pain is present.
 - Your feet may become achy or tired when standing for long periods of time or after playing sports.
- **Treatment**
 - Talk to your physical therapist about options such as orthotic inserts.

A Few More Tips for the Go-Getter

Exercise. Armed with proper fitting footwear, begin a walking or running routine. As always, begin slowly, and in no time you will be feeling great-body and mind!

- Excess weight can put additional pressure on already hard pressed feet, so shedding those pounds will have even more of a benefit.

Give your shoes a rest. Alternating shoes daily allows them to dry out and gives the padding time to return to its normal shape. By doing this, your shoes will last longer, and your feet will be healthier. It's a win-win!

What To Do Next?

We depend on our feet every day. Be kind to them and they will be kind to you.

If you are experiencing chronic foot pain, talk to a physical therapist about treatment and footwear options.