

Footwear for healthy feet

Wearing shoes that fit properly and support your feet is vital to avoid sore feet and to prevent or alleviate many common foot problems. It's also important to choose footwear that will minimise your risk of falling and slipping.

When choosing shoes, you need to consider the activity, the surface and your need for support.

Hard surfaces can cause pain and problems

People who spend a lot of time on hard surfaces – such as concrete – are more prone to heel and forefoot pain and may develop more calluses and corns. To reduce the stresses though your feet caused by standing on hard surfaces, wear supportive shoes (preferably lace-up) with softer soles and innersoles. Arch supports will help distribute weight over a larger surface area so that pressure is not focused on the heel and forefoot.

Lace-up boots may ease sore feet

Lace-up boots maintain the alignment of the leg so that the muscles and ligaments on either side of the foot have even amounts of pressure placed on them. This can help to reduce foot soreness. However, lace-up boots can restrict the range of movement at the ankle joint. As a general rule, wear boots that don't come too high above the ankle and make sure they fit comfortably around the front of the ankle, preferably with a padded tongue.

High heels can place significant stress on your body

High-heeled shoes place the foot into an unnatural position, affecting both the foot and your posture. Prolonged periods of walking in high heels can place unnecessary stress on your back and neck, and result in permanent postural changes. It is not uncommon for women who have worn high heels for most of their working lives to find themselves in pain when they start to regularly wear flat shoes.

The high-heeled shoe also places greater pressure on the forefoot, which can cause a build-up of calluses. The pointed toe places significant pressure on the toes, which can cause permanent deformity including bunions, claw toes, corns and thickening of the nails.

Appropriate footwear is vital for playing sport

Sportspeople require footwear that provides cushioning for shock absorption during running and jumping and stability for side to side activity. Sports shoes should bend easily at the ball of the foot, and the back of the shoe should be supportive and cradle the heel to prevent injury.

Shoe inserts and insoles

Shoe inserts can increase comfort and support and improve foot posture. Insoles bought at pharmacies and sports stores are generally made from soft materials to one generic arch shape. While they may be adequate for some people, they do not address specific problems of individuals and are not moulded to the foot. Some insoles are designed purely to redistribute body weight away from painful areas of the foot.

Podiatrists prescribe insoles to help change an individual's foot posture. A change in foot posture may help to ease foot pain and prevent injury. A cast of the foot is usually taken in plaster and the insoles are tailored specifically to an individual's feet. Because these devices are 'one of a kind', they are often more costly than those purchased **over the counter**.

Alternate your shoes

Alternating your shoes from one day to the next will help to vary the posture of the foot and distribute the load over a greater range of joints and muscles. It will also allow your shoes to dry out and therefore reduce the growth of bacteria. Alternating sports footwear allows the foam cushioning greater time to 'rebound'. This may help prolong the life of your shoes.

Where to get help

- A podiatrist
- Australian Podiatry Association (Vic) Tel. (03) 9866 5906

Things to remember

- See a podiatrist if foot problems persist.
- Wearing shoes that fit properly and support your feet is important for pain-free, healthy feet.
- Select shoes that suit your activity.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Australian Podiatry Association (Vic)

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