

See The Podiatrist



Athletes At Greater Risk For Foot Problems

(NAPSA)—Approximately one-quarter of all the bones in the human body are located in the feet. When these bones are out of alignment, so is the rest of the body. While 75 percent of the population may experience serious foot problems, it's usually not a genetic matter. Most foot problems are brought on by neglect and a lack of awareness of proper care—including ill-fitting shoes.

Your feet mirror your general health. Conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, nerve and circulatory disorders can show their initial symptoms in the feet—so foot ailments can be the first sign of more serious medical problems.

The best exercise for your feet? Walking. It also contributes to your general health by improving circulation, contributing to weight control and promoting all-around well-being.

A number of general foot problems can be caused by strenuous physical activity, including:

- Arch strain/pain—Frequently the result of a common condition called plantar fasciitis. The plantar fascia is a broad band of fibrous tissue located along the bottom surface of the foot that runs from the heel to the forefoot. Excessive stretching of the plantar fascia away from the heel—usually the result of flat feet—can lead to pain in the heel and arch areas. Recommended treatments include shock-absorbing soles in your workout shoes and removable foot insoles.

- Athlete's foot—A fungal infection that causes red, dry, flaking skin, sometimes accompanied by pain or itching. Athlete's foot is often contracted in showers, gyms,



Wearing protective shoes or sandals in public areas can help prevent certain foot problems.

dressing rooms, swimming pool locker rooms or other warm, damp areas where fungus can thrive. Preventive measures include daily washing of the feet followed by thorough drying, and wearing dry, airy shoes and socks. Treatments include prescription medications, either topical or oral.

- Toenail fungus—Known as onychomycosis, it can be picked up in damp areas such as public gyms, shower stalls or swimming pools. Athletes and people who wear tight-fitting shoes or hosiery that cause trauma to the toes or keep the feet from drying out are at higher risk. It is difficult to treat, so the best course is to prevent it by wearing protective shoes or sandals in public showers or pool areas, and by not borrowing other people's shoes, socks or towels.

Foot Health Is Important

When it comes to painful feet, what appears to be minor may grow into a serious issue if left untreated. Seek out a podiatrist if

you notice:

- Blisters, calluses or thickening skin on the foot
- Bumps on the toes
- Peeling skin on heels, sides of feet or between the toes
- Any wound or sore that resists healing
- Thick, brittle, discolored or flaking toenails
- Warts.

Feet are susceptible to fungal infections that can result in itching and burning. Fungal infections under toenails can make walking, standing and wearing shoes miserably painful. Contact a podiatrist if you suffer from brittle nails or dry skin and want your feet to look and feel better.

10 Steps To Healthy Feet

To keep your feet healthy and comfortable, follow these easy foot tips:

- See your podiatrist and follow his or her directions.
- Wear properly fitting shoes.
- Keep feet cool and dry.
- Wash and thoroughly dry feet daily, even between toes.
- Avoid wearing the same shoes two days in a row.
- Always wear shoes in public areas, including hotel rooms and health clubs, to avoid contracting an infection.
- Disinfect shoes regularly with a disinfectant spray.
- Clip toenails straight across.
- Use sterile pedicure instruments.
- Foot pain, itching or ugly toenails should never be ignored.

Your feet are feeling the impact of tremendous pressure with each step. If this is causing you discomfort, do not assume it's unimportant—visit a podiatrist.