

## **LISTEN TO YOUR FEET**

**by Dr. Brian S. Seaman, DC, FRCCSS(C), FICC**

Sore, tired feet? Many people complain of this every day – do you?

There is more to your feet than you may imagine. Did you know that there are 26 bones and 33 joints in each foot? The bones and joints in your feet have to work together, in order for you to move about.

The average person walks about 250,000 miles in their lifetime. An average person who weighs 165-170 pounds and walks an average of 7.5 miles a day will be carrying 500 tons a day on each foot!

Walking or standing all day can place a lot of stress on our feet which in turn can cause related strain or pain in your ankles, knees, hips or even your lower back. Some researchers claim that up to 90% of people have poor foot mechanics. Thus it is essential, for everyone, especially when you are active, for you to be aware of your foot ware and if customized orthotics would be beneficial.

## **CHOOSING YOUR SHOES**

The selection of proper foot wear starts with accurate sizing. You would be surprised how many people are wearing shoes that are too small. Our feet can change over time, yet many of us continue to select the same size shoes we wore 20, 30 or 40 years ago! So start your shoe shopping with proper sizing.

When deciding on your shoe style, be sure you get good advice on proper sizing and support. Being stylish does not necessary mean that you are wearing shoes that are providing adequate support to your feet and ankles.

If you walk a lot as part of your fitness program, be sure to get proper walking shoes. These are designed with shock absorbent soles, arch supports and firm heel support. Lace-up shoes provide better support for the foot and arches, than does a slip on shoe or loafer (best to avoid these).

Through the winter, it is important to select boots that not only keep your feet dry and warm, but also give a reasonable degree of support to the foot and ankle. It is also important to ensure that the tread of the boot will provide a reasonable grip especially on the ice and snow. This becomes more of a challenge with the design of the boot and as many are not flexible or bio-mechanically advantageous like sneakers or walking shoes.

Walking in poorly designed shoes that do not provide proper support can cause foot, ankle, knee or hip pain. In some cases improper or faulty foot mechanics can cause lower back pain too!

## **MY FEET HURT**

A lack of support can cause plantar fasciitis – this is a condition which causes pain on the bottom of your foot. The plantar fascia is the band of tissue which helps to support the arch of your foot. A flattening of your arch (pronation) or a lack of flexibility of the achilles tendon and calf muscle, can contribute to plantar fasciitis. Also, wearing shoes that do not provide proper support for the arch, can also be a contributing factor.

The treatment of plantar fasciitis can include manual therapies, ultrasound, Cryotherapy (ice), and stretching of the calf muscles and achilles tendon. Customized arch supports or orthotics, can also be very helpful in providing proper foot and arch support, thereby assisting in your treatment and restoring proper motion of the foot.

## DO I NEED ORTHOTICS?

Customized orthotics not only support your arch but also allow better functioning of the foot and legs – in other words they are designed to change the way you walk and improve the mechanical efficiency of your foot. Many times problems with our foot and ankle will cause us to alter our gait pattern (how we walk) but remember – you cannot reverse or correct in a few weeks what has taken perhaps years to develop.

Also, if you are a diabetic, be sure to let your health care professional know as this can also have a determination on the style of orthotics. Proper support of the foot and ankle is not only important, but so is ensuring there are no areas of increased pressure which can cause skin difficulties.

So your feet are very important – ‘listen’ to them – treat them well – they will return the favour and keep the ‘spring’ in your step.

*Reprinted with permission of*

The Seniors' Advocate. P.O. Box 5005, Waverly, Nova Scotia, B2R 1S2