

# “My feet hurt by the end of the day. How can I prevent discomfort?”

**Your foot health can be a clue to your overall health.**

Most people take between 5,000 and 10,000 steps a day. The feet bear the weight of your body's every step. It is important to take care of them.

Foot problems can be caused by sports and physical activities, poorly fitting shoes, excess weight and other health conditions.

## **How to keep your feet healthy**

- Wear comfortable shoes that fit properly.
- Wear socks made of materials that absorb or wick away moisture.
- Wash your feet daily with soap and lukewarm water.
- Dry your feet, including between your toes, after washing.
- Trim your toenails straight across and not too short.
- Examine your feet regularly, checking for blisters, signs of irritation or infection.

## **The right shoes are important**

Many foot problems, (bunions, calluses, corns, or hammer, claw or mallet toes), will not become severely painful if you wear shoes that give your toes and the balls of your feet more room.

- Wear shoes that have low heels. High-heeled shoes increase pressure on the foot and on the toe joints. If you cannot avoid wearing pumps or high-heeled shoes, choose shoes with heels that are no more than two inches high.
- Be sure your shoes have wide and deep spaces around the toes. You should be able to easily wiggle your toes.
- Wear shoes that are made of materials that are breathable and can stretch. Avoid shoes made of plastic or vinyl.
- Find shoes that have a sole that doesn't hurt. For some people this means a flexible sole that allows your toes to bend as you walk. For other people, a firm sole that helps the joints stay straight is more comfortable.
- Try to avoid being barefoot both outdoors and indoors. When you are at home, wear sandals, soft-leather flat shoes, slippers or supportive sneakers.

## Pay attention to athletic activities

People who participate in regular athletic activities should pay special attention to their feet. Problems can arise more commonly in athletes.

- Wear an athletic shoe that fits properly and is supportive. Less supportive shoes and shoes that are more flexible allow for the excessive bending of the toes and ankle. This repetitive action can cause injuries and lead to sprains.
- Increase your activities gradually to avoid overuse injuries, such as stress fractures and tendon inflammation
  - Stress fractures happen when repetitive force is placed on a bone for a long period of time, and the bone isn't strong enough to keep up with physical demands.
  - Tendon inflammation or tear injuries are typically due to a loss of flexibility in the tendons or rapid changes in your exercise or activity schedule.

## Chronic health conditions can affect the feet

Diabetes - Nerve damage can be common in people with diabetes. The nerves in the feet and legs are often affected causing loss of feeling. Good diabetes management habits are important. This includes routine checks of the feet for discoloration, spots, cuts, swelling and blisters. Keep your blood sugar levels in your target range and take medicines as prescribed by your doctor.

Osteoporosis - Osteoporosis is a disease of progressive bone loss associated with an increased risk of fractures. One of the first places one may see the effects of osteoporosis is in the feet. Regular exercise and a diet rich in calcium and vitamin D are essential to reduce bone loss and maintain healthy bones.

## When should I visit the doctor?

Contact your primary care provider if you notice any of the following:

- Change in the shape of your feet over time
- Thickened, yellow toenails or fungal infections between your toes
- A blister, sore or ingrown toenail that is infected
- Unusual numbness and/or swelling in your feet
- Foot pain that is severe, comes on suddenly or doesn't improve with simple measures such as rest or over-the-counter pain medications
- Signs of an infection such as a fever, redness or warmth and tenderness in the affected area
- Inability to walk or put weight on your foot
- A wound that isn't healing or is deep, red, swollen or warm to touch (especially for diabetics)