

## Happy Feet = Walking Feet!

Someone recently requested a post about foot care, so here it is! Remember, I'm a walker not a doctor, so if you are having pain that just won't go away, see a professional. Hey, I have an idea: mention it to your Doc at the next walk and see what he or she recommends. Believe me, the longer you put it off, the longer your recovery may be. That advice comes from a stubborn walker who walked for months on a stress fracture because I was preparing for a hike I just didn't want to miss. I didn't miss it, but I then spent two winters in a cast.

I've experienced quite a bit of foot pain since about fifth grade. Playing basketball all summer on a concrete driveway = pain in the arches! High arches, pulled ligaments, a stress fracture, bone bruise, dislocations... been there. Here are some tips I've learned along the way.

- **Invest in a good, proper fitting pair of shoes.** Many things factor into what shoe is best for you: your weight, the width of your foot, whether you have a high arch, normal or are flat-footed, whether you roll in or out (pronating and over pronating), and even how many miles a week you walk.

Lately, my arches have been starting to hurt again. This week I walked five miles and my legs ached. My legs should not ache after five miles. I took off my shoes and looked at the soles. Bingo! Worn out! So before I walked many more miles, I stopped at my favorite running shoe store owned by a runner who knows his shoes. How do you know if the person helping you in the store knows his or her stuff? He or she should look at the bottom of your current shoes to see how you've worn the tread. He or she will watch you walk in your current shoes and in the shoes you try. He or she will ask you if you're having any foot problems or have in the past.

The shoe store owner looked at the soles of my current shoes, bent my shoes, and exclaimed, "You've destroyed these." (I have to admit that was a proud walker moment.) He knows I have high arches (because he's looked) and knows I've had a stress fracture. He puts me in very cushioned shoes. He also always lets me try them on with my inserts, so I can get the real feel.

If you are flat footed, you're most likely rolling in, and you'll need a stability shoe. If you get stability shoes for the first time, ease into wearing them. Wear them for a mile the first day, maybe a little longer the next. Your feet, legs, and hips have to re-learn proper



alignment. It may be uncomfortable at first. The shoe store owner I talked to yesterday likened it to the first time you wear contacts for your vision: uncomfortable at first and takes getting used to.

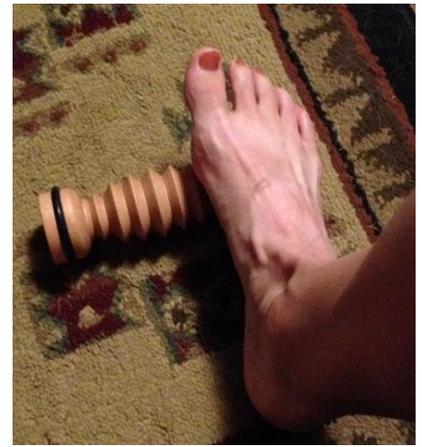
If you are walking a lot of downhills, you may notice your toes hitting the front of your shoes. Buy one-half to one full size shoe bigger to help prevent that. Constantly hitting your toes can lead to pain and losing toe nails! If you walk many miles, your feet may get puffy so the extra length will be welcomed.

Women, if you wear a large size shoe or have a wide foot, consider wearing a man's shoe. I can think of three women right off the top of my head that wear men's running shoes to get a better fit.

Try to bend the shoe in the store. It should bend at the toe only. You should not be able to roll it in a ball. Likewise, you should not be able to twist it. If you can do either of those things, there is not enough support.

- **Keep toe nails trimmed.** Again, you don't want those nails hitting the ends of your shoes. Ouch!
- **Keep callouses filed.** A little bit of a callous is fine, but you don't want your callouses to build up too much and alter the fit of you shoe.
- **Inserts.** I've used Spenco inserts for years. I use the Arch Cushions, because I need the padding and arch support. As soon as I buy a new pair of shoes, I immediately take out the insert that comes with them and put in my Spenco inserts. Spencos have a year guarantee. They will last longer than your shoes! They don't wear down like the inserts that come in the shoes. I paid \$16 for a new pair Saturday. Well worth it. Spenco has different styles and there are different brands out there – find one that works for you.
- **Wear good athletic socks.** Avoid cotton in your socks in order to help prevent blisters. In the colder months, I usually have socks that have some merino wool.
- **Exercise your feet.** The September 2016 issue (on the stands now) of *Women's Running*, has a good article called "Feet of Strength" that shows exercises to strengthen your foot muscles. I can't find the article online yet, but hopefully it will appear soon. An additional exercise I was told to do after spending time in a cast is to write the alphabet with your foot. If you are sitting down, stick your foot out in front of you. In the air, pretend your big toe is your "pencil." Write the alphabet in the air with your big toe. Sounds easy. You'll be surprised at the muscles you'll feel!

- **Roll your arches.** Sometimes I roll my arches on a wooden roller. Folks fighting plantar fasciitis are sometimes told to freeze a bottle of water and roll their arches on that. If you can get a foot massage from someone, go for it!
- **Prevent blisters.** If you have a spot that seems to rub or maybe you're prone to getting blisters between your toes, rub petroleum jelly, bag balm or a petroleum jelly alternative like Waxalene between your toes or across the hot spot before putting on your socks. If I've spent time in the pool before walking, I definitely need that between my toes.



If I'm walking really fast or a long distance, I'm more likely to get a blister in the middle of the ball of my foot. A friend taught me a trick that I've used for several years, and it has never failed me! Get the pre-wrap that is used under athletic tape and wrap your feet in that before putting on your socks. You won't know it's on, keeps your socks in place, and no blisters!



- **Walk on a softer surface.** If you're returning from an injury or your feet and legs have been aching, sometimes you need to find a softer surface on which to walk. If your friends are walking on a concrete sidewalk, maybe you should walk in the grass beside them. I'm used to gravel and dirt roads. I can tell if I walk on asphalt. I have to give my feet and legs time to adjust to the harder surface. Concrete is even harder than the asphalt. Luckily, I live in an area where I can pretty much avoid concrete. If you're a mall walker and your hips, legs or feet have been bothering you, try shifting to a softer surface for a couple weeks to see if it makes a difference. The hard tile on top of concrete in the stores and hallways can wreak havoc. The thin layer of carpeting that some malls put on top does not help very much!

I hope this helps! I know how discouraging painful feet can be, but hopefully this will help you prevent problems from starting. Happy feet = walking feet!