

Looking after your feet at work

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Working feet need care and attention if they are going to survive the hazards feet are exposed to during a working lifetime.

Your feet can take a pounding in the workplace. The daily demands of your job – walking, standing for long periods and lifting – all place your feet under pressure. While you are working your feet may absorb up to three times your body weight and working feet can travel up to 24 kilometres in a day.

Feet not only face the hazards of high heels or ill fitting footwear but also the work environment can create health risks. Hazardous conditions – slippery floors, wet conditions, or extreme heat or cold – put feet at risk and can lead to foot problems when the right advice is not followed.

Stress fractures, sprains, strains, corns, calluses, in-grown toenails, chilblains and tinea are some of the foot problems, which can occur in the workplace or be aggravated at work.

Problems such as calluses, corns and blisters can be caused by friction. If your feet do not fit properly into standard shoes, then you are more likely to experience friction-related foot problems. Aches and pains in the arch, ball of the foot or heel may be related to muscle strain, which is associated with poor foot posture – correcting or improving foot posture can reduce foot strain.

As even minor irritations can reduce your mobility and productivity, it is important to seek help for all foot ailments including sore or tired feet. Individual assessment and advice from a podiatrist is strongly recommended.

Regardless of your workplace – hospital, private practice, office – comfortable, properly fitted footwear is essential to maintaining foot health.

Appropriate footwear can protect your feet by insulating them from the cold, preventing them from getting wet or by cushioning them from the impact of your job.

Some tips for selecting correct footwear

- Ensure that your feet are measured to get your correct size. A good store will measure the length of your foot to the end of

the longest toes and also the length of your foot to the widest part.

- You may need to look at brands that provide a variety of widths if you are not a standard B width. This will cost a little more because it is far more expensive for manufacturers to produce different widths. It is wiser to spend money on the correct size, rather than fashion in the case of shoes you stand in for prolonged periods.

- Look at the shape of your foot and how this relates to the shape of the shoe last.

- If you have quite short toes, the widest part of your foot may be trying to fit into a narrow part of the shoe.

- The higher the heel, the more pressure is exerted on the ball of the feet increasing the likelihood of pain and calluses occurring. For work shoes, do not wear higher than 2.5 cm heels.

- Some shoes have rubber soles with cushioning. These will reduce the pressure on the soles of the feet more than a thin leather or plastic sole.

- The shoe should be able to flex at the point where your toes extend. If the shoe doesn't flex at this point, the shoe will tend to slip up and down at the heel causing irritation at the heel.
- Wear a shoe that encloses the heel. This will support the fat pad under the heel, which provides nature's best cushioning. A sling-back style causes the fat pad to flatten and bulge over the sole of the shoe, which may contribute to heel pain.
- Lace-up shoes or those with a comfortable strap across the midfoot will support the foot better and prevent the foot sliding forward in the shoe. This forward slippage can contribute to friction and corns on the toes and a burning pain under the ball of the foot.
- The best heels have a wide base like a "block heel". Tapered heels provide less sideways stability and may contribute to ankle instability.
- If you experience chronic foot pain or abnormal corns or calluses, we recommend that you consult a podiatrist for treatment.

Foot care in the workplace

We all know that regular maintenance and a yearly maintenance is vital to keep a car running smoothly, yet most of us overlook how important it is to care for our feet.

Working feet can be exposed to many dangers. To avoid painful conditions, you need to follow foot care advice that is suited to your needs.

Pain and discomfort and standing for long periods in unsuitable footwear ultimately affect how well you perform your work, your mobility and may prevent you from walking, playing sport and leading a normal, active life.

Don't ignore footpain

Remember – feet shouldn't hurt. Sore feet are a sign that there may be problems.

If you have foot problems a podiatrist can help to keep your feet comfortable and functioning well.