

DO I REALLY NEED TO CHANGE MY FOOTWEAR?

One of the biggest challenges podiatrists face in treating foot problems is getting the patient to agree to adopt more appropriate footwear.

This usually doesn't preclude you from wearing fashion shoes or high heels on special occasions – it's what you wear for the majority of the time that's important. By virtue of the fact you are attending a podiatrist suggests you are in discomfort and this in turn may well be linked to your footwear.

We know that ill-fitting shoes can be particularly damaging to feet and that by simply changing your footwear can result in drastic improvements to your overall foot health. However, we are acutely aware that fashion and style in our image-conscious society play a big factor in the patient's choice of footwear – unsurprisingly, this is particularly pertinent to our female patients.

WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR IN A SHOE?

There are a lot of factors that go into making the 'ideal' shoe – that is, ideal from a podiatrist's perspective! In essence, a good shoe should have some means of secure fastening – laces or Velcro, for example.

Shoes without fastenings can encourage the toes to 'claw' in an attempt to keep them from sliding around when walking (you may not even be aware of this). In addition, shoes that aren't secure will rub and this friction often results in painful blisters, callus or corns.

Problems are particularly common during the warm weather when sandals are often worn. However, closed-in shoes need to be breathable and well-fitting – you should look for around 1cm of room between your toes and the end of the shoe and ensure that your foot isn't squeezed at the sides.

If you have a bunion you may need wider fitting shoes to accommodate the forefoot. If you have hammered toes look for a deep toe-box so the prominent joints don't rub on the top of the shoe. If you suffer discomfort, or have callus and corns on the underside of your feet, it may help to choose a shoe with a cushioned insole.

Your podiatrist will advise you on what aspect of footwear is most important for your condition. Always try shoes on before you buy, and try buying them later in the day to allow for the slight swelling in your feet that naturally occurs as the day goes on.

WHAT SHOULD I AVOID?

Avoid wearing shoes with narrow or high heels (over 4cm) for prolonged periods. If you're diabetic make sure you regularly check the insides of your footwear to ensure there are no prominent seams or sharp wear patches that may cause an injury – this is particularly important if you have lost some feeling in your feet – again, your podiatrist will advise you on this.

Important: Inappropriate or poor fitting footwear, particularly slippers, are one of the major causes of falls in the elderly. If you, or a relative, have slippers make sure they are replaced when they get worn, and that they fit well and don't 'slop' up and down when you walk.

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about the problem with your foot. This leaflet is not a substitute for professional medical advice and should be used in conjunction with verbal information and treatment given.

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