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FootScope

A foot health message from
Trevor Lane Podiatry

Orthotics

Your feet act as shock absorbers for your entire body. These small bundles of bones, ligaments and muscle carry your full body weight, so problems with your feet can cause problems in your legs, pelvis and lower back. Walking loads an estimated one and a half times your body weight on your feet and running adds up to 5 times your body weight. An imbalanced stance combined with that amount of pressure can lead to a lot of problems affecting foot movement. Orthotics are inserts that are placed inside your shoes. Orthotics have a variety of benefits, from relieving foot pain to supporting your feet in such a way that your knees, hips and spine are better aligned, providing relief for a range of problems not limited to the feet.

There are a number of conditions that lead to increased stress on your feet and the sorts of problems that require orthotics. People with arthritis, diabetes or other conditions that affect circulation, are at increased risk for injury and will usually need the extra support that orthotics provide. If you are overweight or obese your feet will be under a lot of pressure leading to fallen arches (flattened feet) and a tendency for the feet to roll inwards. In the general population, if you suffer from Achilles tendonitis, arch pain or from that burning sensation in the balls of your feet — as often experienced by wearers of high-heeled shoes — orthotics can provide the support you need to relieve pain.

Unlike the insoles and gel-based cushioning pads you might find at your local chemist, orthotics are professionally designed to support your feet. Instead of merely cushioning the painful area, orthotics re-align your feet and correct your walking pattern, providing pain relief through proper support and a corrected stance. In most cases orthotics may prevent disability and further deformity of the foot.

Orthotics are built specifically to fit your unique foot, with adjustments made for your particular needs. So the orthotic will be a perfect fit and completely unique to your foot to allow for targeted reinforcement for the particular problems you are experiencing. Although most orthotics are made from rigid materials (plastic polymer or carbon fiber) to give you the firm support you need, because they are made to precisely fit your feet, they shouldn't feel hard or uncomfortable inside your shoe. These types of orthotics usually last for several years. For patients with sensitive foot problems — including the elderly or people with serious injuries such as ulcers — softer, more flexible orthotics will be made to provide support without causing further pain to already sensitive areas. For serious conditions, orthotics that support the ankle as well as the base of the foot are available.

Orthotics will fit easily into most trainers and flat shoes. Special orthotics can be made specifically for sports shoes that require extra shock absorption and for high heels that don't usually have the heel depth to allow for a full orthotic, so adjustments need to be made. Your podiatrist will ask you what type of shoes you usually wear and you can let them know if you need an orthotic for a dress shoe that might be harder to fit for. Support options are available for most shoes.

If you are experiencing foot pain and would like more information on whether orthotics are right for you, see us for a complete examination.



Are high heels ruining your feet?



We've all been told that a nice high heel makes your legs look longer, and they certainly give a girl confidence and a sense of glamour, but what impact is fashion having on your feet? In 2012, a team of Australian scientists from Griffith University conducted a study of the effects of high heels on movement. The study showed that regular high heel wearers placed more strain on their calf muscles and walked less efficiently than wearers of flat shoes. The effect of wearing high heels for more than 40 hours per week shortens your calf muscle and actually changes your stride even when the heels are off.

High heels are the cause of many discomforts including calluses, corns, bunions and hammer toes as well as nerve and ligament damage resulting from the huge amount of pressure placed on the balls of your feet. These irritations can all lead to more serious issues as you alter your walking style to compensate for painful injury. Un-natural walking patterns mean increased pressure on other areas of your feet, which can result in more serious health issues including problems with the knees, hips and spine.

When wearing high heels, you are placing between 70–80% of your body weight on to the balls of your feet. That's what causes that painful burning sensation! The sustained pressure of all of that weight being distributed in one area rather than across your entire foot gradually causes lots of problems.

The obvious conclusion to this is that it's healthier to wear flat shoes. If flats are a step too far and compromise your sense of style, there are things you can do to keep your feet healthy and to give your feet more support when wearing heels. Only buy heels that fit properly around your heel and don't cause your toes to slide to the front of the shoe. Avoid pointed toes and opt for shoes with a thicker heel to help distribute some of the weight at the back of your foot. A wide toe box will give your toes more wiggle room to stabilise your stance. Also consider limiting your time in heels to only a few hours each day; reducing walking time in heels can make a big difference to the health of your feet.

High heels don't naturally contain much support for your feet so consider options to give your shoes more structure. Silicon inserts at the front of your shoe will give extra padding to the ball of your foot and add a bit of shock absorption. Orthotics are available for high heels and can be fitted to provide support, to adjust the balance of the shoe and thereby redistribute your weight over the whole foot instead of just to the front. Keep an eye out for corns and calluses and get us to remove them professionally to avoid discomfort.

Long-term wear of high heels can lead to stress fractures and osteoarthritis in later life. The Griffith study looked at women who had worn heels for at least two years and the effects were staggering (pun intended!). Imagine the effect of a lifetime of heels. Don't let high heels ruin your feet.

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