

# Fitness And Your Feet



## Fitness Planning

Striving for physical fitness is not to be taken lightly. The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports cautions that unless you are convinced of the benefits of fitness and the risks of unfitness, you will not succeed. Patience is essential. Don't try to do too much too soon; give yourself a chance to improve.

As you exercise, pay attention to what your body, including your feet, tells you. If you feel discomfort, you may be trying to do too much too fast. Ease up a bit or take a break and start again at another time. Drink fluids on hot days or during very strenuous activities to avoid heat stroke and heat exhaustion.

## First Step -- See Your Doctor

Before you start a fitness program, you should consult a physician for a complete physical and a podiatric physician for a foot exam. This is especially so if you are over 60, haven't had a physical checkup in the last year, have a disease or disability, or are taking medication. It is recommended that if you are 35-60, substantially overweight, easily fatigued, smoke excessively, have been physically inactive, or have a family history of heart disease, you should consult a physician.

Once you have been cleared to begin exercise, your first goal is to make physical activity a habit. The goals for your activity program, at whatever level of fitness you presently have, are (a) 30 minutes of exercise, (b) four times a week, (c) at a comfortable pace. Stay true to these goals, and you will become fit.

## Suiting Up and Shoe Up

For your fitness success, you should wear the right clothes and the proper shoes. Wear loose-fitting, light-colored and loosely woven clothing in hot weather and several layers of warm clothing in cold weather.

In planning for your equipment needs, don't ignore the part of your body that takes the biggest beating -- your feet. Podiatric physicians recommend sturdy, properly fitted athletic shoes of proper width, with leather or canvas uppers, soles that are flexible (but only at the ball of the foot), cushioning, arch supports, and room for your toes. They also suggest a well-cushioned sock for reinforcement, preferably one with an acrylic fiber content so that some perspiration moisture is "wicked" away.

Because of the many athletic shoe brands, and styles within those brands, you may want to ask a podiatrist to help you select the shoe you need. Generally speaking, athletic shoes are available in sport-specific styles or cross-training models.

## Foot Care for Fitness

The importance of foot care in exercising is stressed by the American Podiatric Medical Association. According to the American Academy of Podiatric Sports Medicine, an APMA affiliate, people don't realize the tremendous pressure that is put on their feet while exercising. For example, when a 150-pound jogger runs three miles, the cumulative impact on each foot is more than 150 tons.

Even without exercising, foot problems contribute to pain in knees, hips, and lower back, and also diminish work efficiency and leisure enjoyment. It is clear, however, that healthy feet are critical to a successful fitness program.

Further evidence for the necessity of proper foot care is the fact that there are more than 300 foot ailments. Although some are hereditary, many stem from the cumulative impact of a lifetime of abuse and neglect and, if left untreated, these foot ailments can prevent the successful establishment of fitness programs.

### **The Human Foot --A Biological Masterpiece**

The human foot is a biological masterpiece. Like a finely tuned race car or a space shuttle, it is complex, containing within its relatively small size 26 bones (the two feet contain a quarter of all the bones in the body), 33 joints and a network of more than 100 tendons, muscles and ligaments, to say nothing of blood vessels and nerves.

Foot problems are among the most common health ills. Studies show that at least three-quarters of the American populace experiences foot problems of some degree of seriousness at some time in their lives; only a small percentage of them seek medical treatment, apparently because most mistakenly believe that discomfort and pain are normal.

To keep your feet healthy for daily pursuits or for fitness, you should be familiar with the most common ills that affect them. Remember, though, that self treatment can often turn a minor problem into a major one, and is generally not advisable. If the conditions persist, you should see a podiatrist.

These conditions may also occur because of the impact of exercise on your feet:

***Athlete's Foot:*** A skin disease, frequently starts between the toes, and can spread to other parts of the foot and body. It is caused by a fungus that commonly attacks the feet because the warm, dark, climate of shoes and such places as public locker rooms foster fungus growth. You can prevent infection by washing your feet daily in soap and water; drying carefully, especially between the toes; changing shoes and hose regularly to decrease moisture; and using foot powder on your feet and in your shoes on a daily basis.

***Blisters:*** Caused by skin friction and moisture, often from active exercising in poorly fitting shoes. There are different schools of thought about whether to pop them. If the blister isn't large, apply an antiseptic and cover with a bandage, and leave it on until it falls off naturally in the bath or shower. If it is large, it may be appropriate to pop the blister with a sterile needle, by piercing it several times at its roof, then to drain the fluid as thoroughly as possible before applying an antiseptic, and bandaging. If the area appears infected or excessively inflamed, see your podiatrist. Keep your feet dry and wear a layer of socks as a cushion.

***Corns and Calluses:*** Protective layers of compacted, dead skin cells. They are caused by repeated friction and pressure from skin rubbing against bony areas or against an irregularity in a shoe (another reason to have your shoes properly fitted). Corns ordinarily form on the toes and calluses on the soles of the feet, but both can occur on either surface. Never cut corns or calluses with any instrument, and never apply home remedies, except under a podiatrist's instructions.

***Heel Pain:*** Generally traced to faulty biomechanics which place too much stress on the heel bone. Stress also can result from a bruise incurred while walking or jumping on hard surfaces or from poorly made or excessively worn footwear. Inserts designed to take the pressure off the heel are generally successful. Heel spurs are bony growths on the underside, forepart of the heel bone. Pain may result when inflammation develops at the point where the spur forms. Spurs can also occur without pain. Both heel pain and heel spurs are often associated with plantar fasciitis, an inflammation of the long band of supportive connective tissue running from the heel to the ball of the foot. There are many excellent treatments for heel pain and heel spurs. However, some general health conditions -- arthritis and gout, for example -- also cause heel pain.

### **Fitness and Your Podiatrist**

A doctor of podiatric medicine can make an important contribution to your total health and to the success of your fitness program. While podiatrists focus on foot care, they are aware of total health needs and should be seen as part of your annual medical checkup. If your foot ailments are related to a more generalized health problem, your podiatrist will consult with your primary physician or refer you to an appropriate specialist.

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The American Podiatric Medical Association operates a toll-free telephone service, **1-800-FOOTCARE (1-800-366-8227)**, from which consumers can obtain informative literature on a variety of foot health topics. The [American Academy of Podiatric Sports Medicine](#), an affiliate of APMA, may be reached at 1-800-438-3355.

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