



## Foot Health Fact Sheet

# PAIN

### Did you know...

Your feet hold 25% of the bones in your body – each foot has a total of 26 bones with 33 joints – and more than a hundred muscles, tendons, and ligaments?

Are you experiencing pain in your feet or lower limbs? This can provide clues to many related ailments throughout your body. Here is a round-up of what your various pain signals may indicate.

#### What are the main causes of foot and lower limb pain?

There are many causes of this kind of pain, including:

- Heel pain (plantar fasciitis)
- Injury – such as sprains, breaks and fractures
- Arthritis – inflammation of the joints and other tissues
- Tendonitis – inflammation of the tendon structures that attach to the bones of your feet (e.g. the Achilles which connects your calf muscle to your feet)
- Shin splints – refers to pain felt anywhere along the shinbone from the knee to the ankle
- Peripheral vascular disease – where blood flow is constricted
- Sever's disease – is a common cause of heel pain, particularly in young and physically active people
- Deep vein thrombosis – a blood clot that forms in the veins of the leg
- Sciatica and radiculopathy – pain in the buttock and leg caused by pressure on nerves in the lower back
- Flat feet, corns, calluses, bunions or a range of other ailments

#### How can you heal your pain?

A good step is to see your podiatrist, who can assess and treat you as part of a personalised treatment plan. It can also help to look after your overall general health – by drinking plenty of water, wearing correct footwear and exercising regularly where possible.

#### What is the best treatment?

No single treatment works for everyone, which is why it is so important to see a podiatrist who can tailor a treatment plan to specifically reflect your needs.

Treatment for pain can be varied – to include anti-inflammatory medications such as aspirin, ibuprofen, and naproxen. Whereas if swelling and inflammation is the cause of pain – ice packs, strapping and stretching can form part of your treatment plan. For biomechanical issues – such as flat feet or bunions – orthotics may be prescribed as part of a wider treatment plan.

Given the complexity of ailments affecting the feet and lower limbs, only your podiatrist can prescribe the treatment most suited to your needs. Most importantly, don't self-diagnose pain treatment – please see a podiatrist.



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# WHAT IS A PODIATRIST?

### Did you know...

Podiatrists are lower limb experts who are university-trained to prevent, diagnose, treat and rehabilitate medical and surgical conditions of the feet and lower limbs.

Podiatrists are lower limb experts who are university-trained to prevent, diagnose, treat and rehabilitate medical and surgical conditions of the feet and lower limbs. Often, these conditions stem from other underlying health issues such as diabetes and arthritis. However, Podiatrists also manage a large amount of acute/sports injuries like ankle sprains, plantar fasciitis, stress fractures, Achilles tendonitis, shin splints, patellofemoral joint syndrome and much more.

Podiatrists are all around you, and they work in both public health centres and private practice clinics. To find a podiatrist near you, you can search by location at [podiatry.org.au](http://podiatry.org.au)

### Why do people see podiatrists?

Your feet house a quarter of the bones in our entire bodies – in addition to many more various muscles, tendons, ligaments and joints. This makes them extremely vulnerable to injury and diseases that can affect the entire body.

A podiatrist will not just look at your foot, but they will carry out a biomechanical assessment to see how your gait can be impacting other parts of your body, such as your hips and back. (Your gait is the way you walk.)

Podiatrists are university educated to understand the structure and movement of the foot and lower limbs. They diagnose foot conditions, identify systemic overall health conditions that present with foot or lower limb symptoms – and recommend appropriate treatment plans.

### When should you see a podiatrist?

You may be experiencing pain in your feet, ingrown or discoloured skin/nails, corns, skin rashes, foot odour, foot injuries, broader health problems such as diabetes or arthritis, recurrent tripping or falling, problems fitting comfortably in your regular shoes; or if you notice swelling, lumps, or redness on your feet or legs.

It is a common misconception that painful feet are a normal side effect from everyday activities. Yet research shows that only a fraction of individuals suffering from sore feet seek out professional advice.

Just as you would visit your dentist for a toothache, you should visit a podiatrist if you suffer from painful or tired feet and/or lower limbs. You should see a podiatrist 1-2 times a year for a general check-up/maintenance in the same way as you should a dentist. You don't need a GP referral to see a podiatrist. Podiatrists can also connect you into other allied health professionals and specialists to work in a team that gets the best outcomes for you.



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# COMMON SPORTING INJURIES

### Did you know?

There are two kinds of sports injuries? Acute injuries happen suddenly and chronic injuries happen after you play a sport or exercise over a long period of time.

Do you experience pain after exercising? Here are some of the most common sporting injuries, which can affect your legs and feet – to explain why they occur, and how your podiatrist can help.

#### Do you experience heel pain in the morning?

Did you know that plantar fasciitis is the most common form of heel pain? While there are many reasons for morning foot pain, plantar fasciitis is common in runners and dancers. It's best to ask your podiatrist for an assessment, diagnosis and treatment if you are experiencing any kind of heel pain.

#### Do you have a painful big toe?

This could be Sesamoiditis, which can be caused by anything from 'weekend warrior' workouts, to high intensity activities. It can help to rest or take a break from the activity and check your shoes are the correct type for the activity you are doing. If pain persists, see your podiatrist who can help.

#### Do you have a bruised toenail?

This is caused by a haematoma. A haematoma is a bleed under the nail, which can be caused by ill-fitting shoes when running or hiking. The first thing you may want to do is check the fit of your shoes is correct – and see your podiatrist if symptoms don't improve.

#### Do you have painful knees or hips?

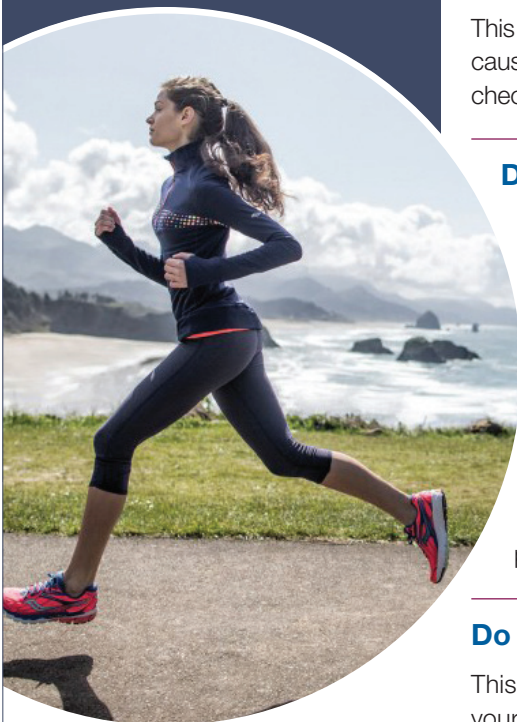
Sore knees and hips are caused by many reasons, but often surprisingly, this pain can be caused by your gait, which is the way you walk. A podiatrist doesn't just focus on the feet, they can look at the biomechanics of your foot and lower limb region to assess the potential cause of any hip or knee pain.

#### Do you have a painful ball of the foot?

This can make walking – or any exercise – very challenging! You might have a stress fracture or a neuroma. When it comes to likely causes for a painful ball of the foot, the list of possibilities is endless. Make sure you book in with your podiatrist to have this properly assessed and treated.

#### Do you have sore shins?

This could be shin splints, which can be caused by a range of factors – and treated by your podiatrist.



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## Foot Health Fact Sheet

# INCORRECTLY FITTED SHOES

### Did you know?

Most people have one foot that is larger than the other. Make sure you have both feet measured – and fit your shoes to the larger foot.

You may be wearing incorrectly fitted shoes and simply not be aware of this. Whatever the circumstance, here is how you can help to ensure your shoes fit correctly.

### How do you know if your shoes fit correctly?

Here are some tips to help ensure your shoes fit correctly.

- Are you in pain? Pain is the most obvious signal that your shoes are ill-fitting – does taking your shoes off give you relief? This is your biggest clue!
- Is there enough space between your longest toe and the end of the shoe? Look for around 1.5 centimetres of space ideally. Remember, your big toe may not always be your longest toe.
- Have you tested a range of surfaces? Check how your shoes move with your feet when walking on carpet, tiled areas or other surfaces – your heels shouldn't move inside your shoes on any surface.
- Have you looked at the widest part of the shoe? This should match where the ball of your foot sits, that is, the widest part just before your toes.
- Have you had your feet measured by a professional? Ideally have your feet measured before buying shoes – preferably at the end of the day, as this is when your feet are at their largest.

### What ailments can be caused by incorrectly fitted shoes?

These include:

**Plantar fasciitis** – you may experience a deep ache or shooting pain in the heel if you have plantar fasciitis.

**Bunions** – can present as a swelling or deformity of the first joint of the big toe.

**Blisters** – can be caused by a range of reasons, but a friction blister is usually caused by tight shoes that create irritation through the foot rubbing against the shoe.

**Metatarsalgia** – this condition is when the ball of the foot becomes so inflamed it can be unbearable to stand or walk.

**Corns and calluses** – can be caused by continuous friction between the foot and the shoe, which can be avoided by wearing correctly fitted shoes.

### Where can you go to get shoes fitted correctly?

A podiatrist is able to assess whether your current shoes fit correctly and make recommendations if not. When in store, ask to be professionally measured and fitted before buying any shoes.



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## Foot Health Fact Sheet

# TOP TIPS TO CARE FOR YOUR FEET

### Did you know...

Your feet are mirrors of your health! Foot issues are warning signs of underlying health conditions, yet many foot problems can be prevented if noticed early.

Richard Lee, registered Podiatrist and Director of The Walking Clinic, recommends these top tips to care for your feet:

#### 1. Maintain healthy nails

A very common thing podiatrists see on a daily basis, are fungal nail infections, this is when the nail becomes discoloured, thickened and brittle.

Mr Lee says, "To help avoid fungal nail infections, frequently wash and dry your feet, avoid going barefoot in public showers or pool areas (thongs are great to wear in public showers), don't wear the same pair of socks two days in a row, hang your socks inside out in the sun (UV light is a natural fungus killer), don't share footwear with other people, air your shoes regularly in the sun and try not to wear the same pair of shoes each day."

Mr Lee suggests adding a drop of tea tree oil into your moisturiser, or adding a few drops to your washing, when washing socks. Making up a diluted spray and spraying your feet can help reduce the risk of fungal infection.

#### 2. Wear correctly fitting shoes

Up to twice your bodyweight in force is applied through your feet and legs with every step, so it's important to have comfortable and appropriate footwear. To avoid pain it is important to have shoes that fit well and are comfortable, especially so for athletes and people who are constantly working on their feet, including tradespeople, teachers, hospital staff, police and emergency services.

Mr Lee says, "We commonly see that people wear shoes that are too small for them, so make sure that there is about 1.5 centimetres (thumb width) of space between your longest toe, which may not be your big toe, and the end of the shoe. Having a shoe that bends with your feet, especially at your toes, is also important not only for comfort, but also for facilitating training routines.

"Don't underestimate comfort, there is now evidence to say that shoe comfort can help reduce injury risk, so make sure that you get the shoe that is most comfortable not just your favourite colour."

#### 3. Foot and lower limb pain or tiredness

It is very important not to ignore what your feet and legs are telling you. One of the most common serious foot conditions in Australia is Plantar Fasciitis, which is noticeable through a deep ache or shooting pain in the heel. Tired feeling legs is another common complaint podiatrist's see.

Mr Lee says, "There can be many different reasons why people might be getting tired legs, from muscle fatigue due to muscle imbalance, through to reduced blood flow or blood pooling in the legs. Seeking podiatry advice can help manage these symptoms and improve your quality of life."



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# LOOKING AFTER AGEING FEET

### Did you know?

Foot pain affects one in four older people, with forefoot pain affecting two-thirds.

Ageing is a fact of life. After your feet have carried you millions of kilometres through your life, they can eventually wear down. But there are ways to keep your feet healthy as you age – through proper maintenance, care and regular check-ups.

#### What happens to feet as they age?

As you age, you can lose cushioning and soft tissue fat in the pads of your heels and balls of your feet, near your toes. Like the skin on your face, there is also a loss of elasticity in the skin on your feet, making it thin and vulnerable.

Bone deformities – such as bunions or arthritis – and difficulties undertaking basic foot care, can lead to foot health issues and sometimes an increased risk of falls – which for many can have drastic consequences.

Nails also become more brittle, thicker and harder, making them difficult to trim and prone to ingrown toenails, fungal breakouts and other infections.

#### Can foot problems be improved?

For older people, most foot problems can be improved by regular maintenance and care, keeping weight down, shoe modification and use of cushioned insoles.

To undertake regular foot maintenance, some elderly people have difficulty reaching their feet or have bad eyesight, so simple things like cutting toenails can be an issue – if this is the case get a family member to help or go and see a podiatrist. If you can cut your toenails yourself, make sure you trim them just short of the end of the toe, using a strong pair of nail clippers. After clipping, smooth the nails with a file or emery board, using downward strokes. It is also important to have your feet measured frequently as the bones in your feet change with age, this way you can ensure you choose shoes that fit well and are comfortable.

Taking good care of your feet as you age is good for your foot health as it helps you stay active and mobile.

#### When should you see a podiatrist?

Your feet are mirrors of your health. Warning signs of health conditions can be dry skin, brittle nails, burning and tingling sensations in your feet, or feelings of cold, numbness, and discolouration. If these occur, see a podiatrist, as they, along with your GP, will be able to pinpoint the cause.

Regular check-ups with your podiatrist are recommended, especially if you cannot look after your feet yourself and you have no one to help you. Nails that grow too long can become infected and if you are diabetic – which has a higher risk factor as we age – infection can lead to more serious illness.



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# SCHOOL SHOES

### Did you know?

You should avoid shoes made from synthetic materials, as children's feet perspire and need to be able to breathe.

Do you want to keep an eye on your children's feet and ensure their school shoes fit correctly? Learn how to support growing feet – at school and beyond.

Your children's feet will spend most of their growth period in school shoes. This is why it is so important to seek out sound advice on the correct fitting of school shoes. Whether your child is standing, sitting, walking, running, jumping or skipping; their feet are always on the move. Purchasing shoes that support your child's feet is usually at the top of the 'back to school' shopping list.

### How do you pick the right school shoe for your child?

All shoes should protect your children's feet – but particularly school shoes, since children spend so much time in them. To ensure their shoes fit properly, make sure you have your children's feet measured regularly for length and width; so the shoe fits the natural shape of their foot, especially around the toes. A podiatrist is well placed to carry out this task.

Specifically, the toe of the shoe should allow your child's toes to move freely and not be squashed from the top or the sides. Make sure there is about 1cm growing room between the end of their longest toe and the top end of their shoe. Also bear in mind that shoes should fit comfortably around the heel, and not be too loose or too tight.

Having shoes fitted by a store that offers trained assistants can also help ensure the correct size and shape to keep little feet running and jumping.

### When should you seek advice from a podiatrist?

A podiatrist can help ensure your child's school shoes fit correctly. A check-up with a podiatrist is also recommended if you notice changes, such as uneven shoe wear on the heels; or if pain is reported such as skin rashes, hard skin, lumps, bumps or itching on your child's feet. A podiatrist can also help your child if they complain of recurrent pain in their feet or legs, especially as activities increase at school; or if your child is constantly tripping or falling at school – or outside of school.

You should also consider the help of a podiatrist if you notice your child walks on their tip toes, or their walk does not look symmetrical (the same on both feet and legs); or if you have any other general concerns about your child's foot health.



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## Foot Health Fact Sheet

# FOOTWEAR HEALTH CHECK

### Did you know...

Your feet house a quarter of the bones in your entire body? This is why it is so important to ensure your shoes fit properly!

Ready to buy some new shoes? Carry out these five steps first, to ensure your feet stay healthy and well-protected.

#### Step 1: Push

Want to see how much support your shoes provide? Push the back ends of your shoes inwards. If the back end stays firm, the heel counter is robust and will provide significant support to your feet. If the back end bends inwards, the heel counter is flexible. This means you either have a light-weight training shoe meant for activities that don't require support, or you may need to re-think your footwear purchase!

#### Step 2: Bend

Want to check your shoe is flexible where it counts? Bend it where your toes will go. Your foot naturally bends and flexes at your metatarsal joints, located just behind your toes. Having a shoe that bends with your feet is important not only for comfort, but also for facilitating training routines. The more flexible and elastic your shoe is where the metatarsal joints bend, the greater your ability to activate and act on the muscles in your foot.

#### Step 3: Twist

Want to make sure your foot is supported during physical activities? Ensure the middle section of your shoe can't twist.

You should not be able to twist your shoes through the middle, instead it should remain stable and firm. This is essential for supporting your foot arch, and when bearing the weight of your body.

#### Step 4: Tie

Want to make sure your feet are firmly secured in your shoes? Tying laces can help! If you don't want to use laces, then buckles or velcro can achieve the same result. By securing your feet, it helps to keep your toes from jamming into the front end of your shoes – and it increases support, which can help relieve pain in your feet.

#### Step 5: The rule of thumb

Want to ensure your shoes fit correctly? Look no further than your thumb!

You should leave about one thumb-width (1.5cm) of space between the tip of your longest toe and the front end of the shoe you are fitting for. This is because as you move, your foot slides forward. If your toes are touching the front end of your shoes, then they are too small! Remember – your longest toe may not necessarily be your big toe!



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# DO YOU NEED TO SEE A PODIATRIST?



## DOES THE FOLLOWING APPLY TO YOU OR YOUR FAMILY?

- Can you only walk for a short period before your feet or legs hurt?
- Do you experience pain in your lower limbs at night?
- Do you experience tingling in your feet?
- Have you noticed your legs or feet are swollen?
- Do you have cuts or fissures on your feet that take a long time to heal?
- Are you returning to sport after an injury?
- Are you uncertain about which running or sports shoe to buy?
- Do you find that you wear out the outside of your shoes quickly?
- Have you noticed your toes poke holes in the top of your shoes?
- Does your forefoot become hot and painful after running or walking?
- Do your hips hurt?
- Has pain in your feet or legs stopped you from exercising?
- Are you worried about your child's feet?
- Do you have arthritis in your feet?
- Do you experience reoccurring gouty attacks?
- Are you worried about the thickness of your nails?
- Do you have discoloured toe nails?
- Are you worried about your foot odour?
- Do your toe nails cause you pain?
- Have you noticed your toes are clawed?
- Do you have hard skin on your feet? Is it getting worse?
- Do you find it hard to cut your own nails?
- Do you find it hard to fit your feet into shoes because of your bunion?

**Ticked one or more boxes? Then you need to see a podiatrist.**

## GO SEE A PODIATRIST BECAUSE...

Podiatrists are Foot Health Experts and understand the structure and movement of your feet and lower limbs.

They can assess, diagnose and treat foot, ankle, knee, leg or hip pain.

Given your feet alone house a quarter of the bones in your entire body, a podiatrist is best placed to get you moving, active or pain-free.

## FIND A PODIATRIST NEAR YOU

Contact the Australian Podiatry Association at [podiatry.org.au](http://podiatry.org.au) and search by postcode or suburb to find a podiatrist close to you.



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