

Walking Tips - Doctor Your Walker's Feet

Walking doesn't put as much stress on your feet, legs and hips as running, but you can still pick up injuries and niggly pains, especially if you don't look after your feet. Some foot afflictions can be downright unpleasant, so look out for these conditions and treat your feet with care.

BLISTERS

This is a fluid-filled layer of outer skin that develops from repeated friction of the skin. The heat and moisture inside your shoes aggravates the problem, and shoes or socks that don't fit also contribute to the development of blisters.

- Prevention - Make sure your big toe has at least 1cm of room in the toe-box, and throw out 100% cotton socks because they retain and hold moisture against the skin.
- Treatment - Pop it with a sterilised needle to drain the fluid, but keep the roof of the blister intact. Apply an antibiotic cream and a plaster afterwards.

CORNS AND CALLUSES

Like blisters, these are thickened layers of skin on the toes and the sole of the foot. Corns generally appear on the toes while calluses can develop anywhere on the foot. Corns are more commonly caused by buckled or bent toes called "hammertoes" which create pressure points and eventually corns on the toes.

- Prevention - Moisturise your feet thoroughly and invest in comfortable walking shoes. Use a pumice stone on corns and calluses to remove them.
- Treatment - If they're there but not causing any pain, treatment is not necessary. Sore corns and calluses can be treated with a pumice stone. Professional help may involve gentle shaving off of the corns or calluses, or even foot surgery to correct a toe deformity.

INGROWN TOENAILS

This is caused by the toenail pressing into and breaking the skin, often quite a painful condition that's prone to infection. Signs to watch for are puffiness, redness and tenderness of the skin around the toe.

- Prevention - Make sure your shoes fit properly with enough room in the toebox for you to wiggle your toes. Keep your toenails trimmed, but not too close at the corners.
- Treatment - The DIY solution is to soak the foot in Epsom salts and apply antibacterial ointment to the affected area. Professional treatment involves removing the side bar of the nail, a quick and effective way of relieving the pain.

PLANTAR FASCIITIS

The plantar fascia is a ligament-like structure running the length of the sole of the foot. This condition develops when the ligament becomes inflamed, causing pain on the underside of the heel or at the arch of the foot. The pain is usually most acute when getting out of bed and directly after exercise.

- Prevention - Replace old shoes before they become worn out, and make sure that the ones you have fit your foot type. Take it easy and vary the surfaces you walk on, mixing grass or gravel with tarmac or paved surfaces.

- Treatment - This is a two-fold process of reducing inflammation and providing the right kind of support and cushioning for your foot to prevent and treat stress on the plantar fascia. Use ice-packs on painful feet and wear solid supportive shoes during the day. See a podiatrist if the problem persists.

FOOTNOTE

It can be most frustrating to have your walking programme stalled because of an injury. A little tender loving care for your feet, like a good foot-rub and some comfortable shoes, will keep your feet healthy and injury-free, and your walking on-track.