



Proper Foot Care To Keep You In The Game

By Emanuel M. Haber, DPM

Many Americans refrain from exercising and athletic pursuits due to foot pain present before, or caused by, these activities. Consulting a Podiatrist about proper foot care can help your feet go the distance.

PREVENTION GOES A LONG WAY. You can avoid many debilitating foot problems, from painful blisters to more aggravated conditions like heel pain and plantar fasciitis, through informed selection of sports socks and shoe gear, stretching exercises and proper foot alignment with a custom-molded orthotic insert. There are a wealth of articles focusing on these and other preventive measures on the websites of the American Podiatric Medical Association (www.apma.org) and the American Academy of Podiatric Sports Medicine

(www.aapsm.org). They not only provide foot care tips for active adults, but those of particular importance for young children.

PODIATRIC SPORTS MEDICINE. If foot pain already is sidelining you, there are several new advances for many of these common conditions that can bring you relief and get you back in the game before the season ends:

Heel Pain: The heel is the largest bone in the human foot. Heel pain is usually the result of faulty biomechanics (walking abnormalities or imbalances) or may result from injuries incurred during athletics that require running and/or jumping on hard surfaces. Often debilitating, the pain can occur in the front, back or bottom of the heel.

Heel pain also can occur in children, mostly between ages 8 and 14, as they become more active in sports. Extensive physical activity, particularly jumping, inflames the heel's growth plates. Luckily, when the bones mature the problems disappear, usually for good. Until then, it is best to consult your Podiatrist to protect the growing heel bone of your budding all-star.

Another heel condition, common to many runners and weekend warriors, is **Plantar Fasciitis**. PF occurs when the soft tissue structure attached to the heel bone over-stretches from weight-bearing, causing pain on the heel bottom. This stretching over an extended period of time will cause the tissue structure to become inflamed and the heel pain more extreme.

Beyond traditional therapies such as injections, oral anti-inflammatory medicines, stretching exercises and orthotics, or even heel surgery, new modalities such as **Shockwave Therapy (ESWT)** and the **Topaz** procedure can relieve the pain by lengthening the tightened heel structure.

One of the most exciting new developments in Sports Medicine is **Plantar Rich Platelet (PRP)** therapy, which combines the latest technology with the body's natural ability to heal itself. PRP aids in the repair of ligaments and tendon injuries and shortens rehabilitation time. It may preclude the need for cortisone injections or even surgery. Many high-profile athletes, weekend warriors and even some teenage athletes have benefitted from this new outpatient treatment.

Fungal toenails can be as painful as they are ugly to look at. When the nail gets hardened and thick, it can prevent you from wearing certain shoes and therefore limit your options for athletic activities as well as fashion. The newest generation of fungal lasers bathe the toenail in light to kill the fungus and spur the growth of a normal, healthy toenail as the fungal nail grows out.

Whether you are gearing up for the gym, racquetball or tennis court or want to spend more time training for the big race, taking good care of your feet will help keep you on them and pain-free.

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