

Shoe Shopping Pointers for Happy, Healthy Feet

Planning to become more active? It's important to plan and prepare for an active lifestyle, and just as consumers purchase special equipment for new recreational activities, they should carefully consider the shoes they choose for sports - as well as everyday wear.

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure - especially when it comes to choosing footwear,” says Paul Lucas, 2008 President of the Pedorthic Association of Canada and a Canadian Certified Pedorthist, a footwear and orthotic expert.

As a Canadian Certified Pedorthist, Lucas cannot stress enough to patients the importance of distinguishing between occasional and functional shoes. He explains, “Occasional shoes are shoes that people will only wear a few times,

to a party or an event, so the evaluation process is not as crucial for these shoes. Functional shoes are the shoes people wear everyday, for work and play, as part of their active lifestyles. Because these shoes provide feet and legs with support for the majority of the day, the selection process is very important to maintaining a healthy, active lifestyle.”



In selecting functional shoes, it is important to carefully consider the fit and function of shoes to ensure they will provide consumers with maximum support. This is important for all age groups: children whose feet are developing, adults who spend hours on their feet and often suffer from foot and leg discomfort unaware it's caused by improper footwear, and senior citizens - where studies have shown that improper footwear is one of the leading causes of falls.

One test consumers can do to evaluate the fit of their footwear is to have someone trace the outline of their foot while standing. The insole of the shoe should then be placed over the tracing to compare foot shape to shoe shape. Most of the tracing should be contained within the insole, especially the heel and ball of the foot, otherwise excessive pressure can lead to foot problems such as calluses, corns, and the development of a neuroma: a pinching of the nerves in the ball of the foot.

Below are three shoe tests you can perform to help ensure you are selecting the right type of footwear for you and/or your family:

Removable Insole - Although many consumers are not aware of this tip, it is important to replace the removable insoles in shoes

on a regular basis, every two to four months, in order to maintain proper cushioning. In failing to do so, the cushioning present in some shoes can quickly wear out depending on the quality of the material and can lead to problems. While cushioning requirements vary from one foot type to the next, the benefits of proper cushioning include less stress on your joints and improved muscle function. For hygiene purposes, it's also helpful to buy a second set of insoles when you buy your shoes and rotate them at the end of each day to let the insoles dry in between each use.

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Proper Heel Counter - The Heel Counter is the hard piece in the back of the shoe that controls the foot's motion from side-to-side. A strong heel counter increases stability providing better support for the foot. If the heel is not contained snugly, there can be excessive movement when the consumer walks resulting in blisters and microtearing causing foot pain. Consumers can quickly test the effectiveness of a shoe's heel counter by placing the shoe in the palm of their hand and putting their thumb in the mid-portion of the heel, trying to bend the back of the shoe. A heel counter that does not bend very much will provide superior motion control.

Bend and Twist Test - Another test consumers can try when purchasing new footwear is to hold the shoe in both hands at opposite ends, and bring their hands together (similar to a slow clapping motion). Ideally, the shoe should only bend at the ball of the foot, which matches the movement of the foot. If this does not happen or if the shoe can be rolled into a ball, the shoe may cause increased pressure on the wrong parts of the foot or provide no support at all to the foot. This can easily damage the joints and soft tissue of the foot.

These are just a few helpful pointers for selecting proper footwear. If a person is experiencing foot pain or discomfort, they should first consult their physician to be properly diagnosed and to develop an appropriate treatment plan. Their doctor may refer them to a Canadian Certified Pedorthist, an orthotic and footwear. Pedorthists (C. Ped (C)) are one of the few healthcare professionals trained in the assessment of lower limb anatomy and biomechanics. With specialized education and training in the design, manufacture, fit and modification of foot orthotics and footwear, Pedorthists help to alleviate pain, abnormalities and debilitating conditions of the lower limbs and feet that if left untreated could result in limited mobility.