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PODIATRY

FootScope

A foot health message from
Proactive Podiatry

Obesity and podiatry



Is weight gain crushing your feet?

Just as obesity has led to more cases of heart disease, stroke and diabetes, the epidemic has also resulted in an increase in foot and ankle problems. Even small increases in weight can have an impact on your feet as every bit of extra weight amplifies the amount of force placed on your feet when you walk. Your feet act as shock absorbers for the entire body and, if the body mass they are supporting is larger than the amount of force they are built to absorb, problems will develop not only in the feet, but up the entire body — through the knees, hips and spine.

The main foot problems resulting from obesity include heel pain, arch pain and heel spurs, which are caused by a build up of calcium on the heel bone. Pressure placed on the heel can cause heel pain in a variety of forms and can become a chronic condition if not treated. Extra weight can place enough pressure on the arches to cause them to collapse, leading to a host of other foot problems including a greater tendency for the feet to roll inwards, which forces the tendons to work harder to support the feet. All of these conditions are serious and can lead to chronic, debilitating pain that may require surgery.

Early treatment is the best course of action for anyone with obesity. There are many therapies available that help to prevent foot and ankle problems. Wearing supportive shoes, orthotics and insoles that provide additional shock absorption all reduce damage to the tendons and ligaments of the feet and can help to prevent the need for surgery. Lifestyle adjustments can also help to heal foot pain. A healthy lifestyle involving diet and exercise will lower body mass index (BMI) and reduce the amount of strain placed on the feet. If walking is too painful, swimming and other water sports are excellent forms of exercise that don't place any pressure on the feet. Lowered BMI will make way for more comfortable feet, and lowered health risk for the body as a whole.

Foot care tips for obese patients

Foot care is important for everyone, but, for those suffering from obesity, problems with the feet can very quickly lead to a decline in overall health and quality of life. Here are some tips to keep the feet healthy in obese patients:

1. Properly fitted shoes: obese patients will have wide feet as the weight is spread across the foot, so it's important to find shoes that accommodate the width of the foot and provide a large toe box so the toes have room to move. Shoes that have support, and fastenings such as laces or Velcro straps, will help to stabilise the feet and take some of the pressure off the tendons supporting the ankles.

2. Get custom orthotics and insoles: a podiatrist can assess the feet and have orthotics made to support the feet exactly where support is needed. Orthotics can be built into cushioned insoles that provide extra shock absorption to take the pressure off the knees, hips and spine as well as the feet.

3. Exercise: it may sound like an impossible ask to get out and exercise when the feet are in pain, but with the right shoes and supports pain will be reduced to make exercise easier. Sports with no impact on the feet, such as swimming, can be an ideal alternative while the feet are recovering. Exercise is crucial to preventing long-term foot health deterioration, as weight loss will significantly reduce the amount of force the feet have to endure.



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