

# Don't take those feet for granted

They are really delicate, finely-balanced instruments that can be damaged very easily

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It's summer, the season when feet come out of hiding.

Whether it's open-toed sandals or barefoot on the beach, this is the time of year when we become reacquainted with those nails on the other end of our bodies.

Let's face it; most of us take our feet for granted. Generally, they get us from A to B with little complaint.

Yet, despite the lowly foot's humble posture, it is really a delicate and finely-balanced instrument, one which can be easily damaged.

In our work-a-day, make-sure-you-look-busy world, many of us spend more than four hours a day standing or walking and that's long enough to cause excessive strain to the feet.

If you think about it, that's a lot of people. It includes — just to name a few — nurses, teachers, miners, letter carriers, retail salespeople, industrial workers, cashiers, mechanics, restaurant and hotel, workers, supermarket workers and cooks.

Maybe it includes you.

Being on your feet for more than four hours a day, on a regular basis, can affect your feet in several ways, including tendonitis, bunions, corns, inflammation, fallen arches and flat feet.

Problems with the feet don't just stay there either. They begin to affect the rest of the body.

Losing the arch in the foot changes the position of the knee and hip, making them more vulnerable to injury.

Lower back pain, varicose veins and even some neck problems can be Caused by prolonged standing work.

Stressed feet also means a greater likelihood of arthritis in the knees and hips.

The funny thing is, most people can't distinguish fatigue in their legs from whole-body fatigue. If you spend a lot of time on your feet, maybe that tired-all-over feeling you get has more to do with your feet than you realize.

So what can we do about it?

Here are some tips:

- Reduce standing time. Provide stools for positions that traditionally require standing. (Stools are already used by grocery clerks and retail salespeople in Europe.) Put one foot up on a six-inch stool or foot rail. If you can't sit, alternate standing and walking to keep the blood flowing.
- Modify the floor surface. Concrete is the worst surface for your feet. Mats, padding or even cardboard helps. Or try a specially designed anti-fatigue mat.
- Provide foot clearance for standing work stations. If the counter has no clearance underneath for feet, then the whole standing body posture is thrown off.
- Reduce the pressure on the feet. Use muscles. Stand with one foot in front of the other (this helps shift the weight forward from the heel to the ball of your foot, which is healthier for weight bearing). Lose excess weight. Buy a new pair of shoes. Old shoes lose their shock absorbency and don't protect feet well.
- Buy shoes that are foot friendly. Shoes should fit the shape of your feet (a firm grip for the heel and freedom for the toes). Wear shoes that have arch supports and that elevate your heel by at least one-eighth of an inch. Don't wear flat shoes or heels higher than two inches. Shoes with laces generally allow for better fit because they can be adjusted. Your feet should not slip inside your shoes.

• **This column, provided by the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, Sudbury Clinic, runs periodically in The Sudbury Star.**