

Feet at Work

Your feet can take a pounding in the workplace.

The daily demands of your job – walking, standing for long periods, lifting, jumping on or off machinery – all place your feet under pressure. While you are working your feet may absorb up to three times your body weight and working feet can travel up to 24 kilometres in a day!

The work environment itself can create health risks for your feet. Hazardous conditions – oily or slippery floors, wet conditions, or extreme heat or cold – put feet at risk of injury and can lead to foot problems.

FOOT PROBLEMS

Stress fracture, sprains, strains, corns, calluses, in-grown toenails, chilblains and tinea are some of the foot problems, which can occur in the workplace or be aggravated at work.

Problems such as calluses, corns and blisters can be caused by pressure. If your feet do not fit properly into standard shoes or boots, then you are more likely to experience pressure-related foot problems. Deep aches or pains in the arch, ball of the foot or heel may be related to muscle strain, which is associated with poor foot posture – correcting or improving foot posture can reduce foot strain.

As even minor irritations can reduce your mobility and productivity, it is important to seek help for all foot

ailments including sore or tired feet.

Individual assessment and advice from a podiatrist is recommended.

FOOT RISKS

In almost every workplace there is the risk of trips, slips and falls, or objects falling or rolling on to feet. Be aware of foot hazards and use foot-safe work practices.

FOOTWEAR

Regardless of your workplace – office, shop, warehouse, restaurant – comfortable, properly fitted footwear is essential to maintaining foot health.

Appropriate footwear can protect your feet by insulating them against cold, preventing them from getting wet or by cushioning them from the impact of your job.

In many workplaces safety shoes/boots are necessary to protect against environmental risks but they also need to be comfortable and correctly fitted. Always have your feet measured. Remember that the length, width and depth of the shoe should all be considered.

Be specific and insistent about your requirements.

Foot Care in the Workplace

EMPLOYERS

As an employer you can prevent foot problems at work by:

- ▶ Promoting foot health in your workplace, especially during Foot Health Week (see reverse for details)
- ▶ Contracting a podiatrist to give a talk on foot care to employees.
- ▶ Encouraging your staff members to report foot problems, however minor. (E.g. safety shoes that rub.)
- ▶ Looking at the foot health record of your company – multiple foot complaints may suggest the workplace itself is creating foot problems.
- ▶ Doing a 'Foot Risk Assessment' in the workplace – look for ways to minimize the burden on your employees' feet. (A podiatrist may be able to assist you with assessing workplace foot risks.)
- ▶ Emphasizing to the safety officer or occupational physician that foot complaints should be taken seriously.

- ▶ If your employees wear safety shoes, ask your yourself: Do we stock an adequate range of safety shoes to suit every staff member? If not, out-sourcing the supply and fit of safety shoes may be more cost-effective.
- ▶ Allowing employees a crossover period when they exchange their old safety shoes for a new pair.

EMPLOYEES

As an employee, you can maintain your foot health by:

- ▶ Being aware of the hazards in your workplace. If you have concerns about foot safety, alert your workplace representative or your employer.
- ▶ Reporting any foot pain or discomfort to your employer or safety officer.
- ▶ Making sure your shoes fit properly and that you wear appropriate shoes for your workplace. (Eg. safety shoes if applicable.)
- ▶ Remembering – feet shouldn't hurt. Sore feet are sign of problem.
- ▶ Visiting a podiatrist if you have foot problems.



Your podiatrist

Podiatrists are highly skilled health professionals trained to deal with the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of medical and surgical conditions of the feet and lower limbs. Podiatrists have completed a Bachelor of Podiatry or higher degree, and are continually upgrading their skills and knowledge through further education and training.

Where can I find a podiatrist?

Refer to your Yellow Pages™ for a list of podiatrists in your area, or contact the Australian Podiatry Association in your state, or the New Zealand Society

of Podiatrists. Many health funds provide cover for podiatry services on their ancillary tables. Government-funded services are available through the Department of Veteran's Affairs, some public hospitals and community health centers.

Foot Health Week

Foot Health Week is held annually (2nd week in October) by the Australasian Podiatry Council to highlight the need for foot care in the community. The Council produces kits for Foot Health Week, which include posters, brochures and a range of information on foot health issues.

** This information is not to be used as a substitute for podiatric or medical assistance*

My podiatrist is:



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