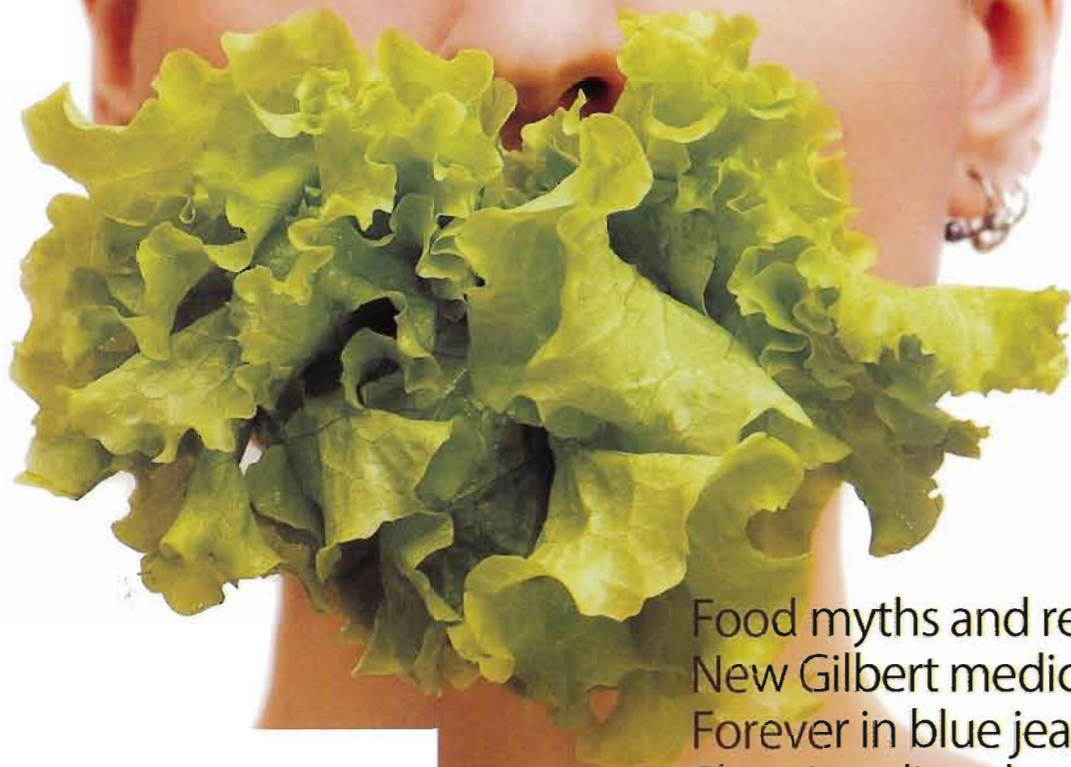


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Pain in the feet

By J.R. Stepps

It's true that when your feet hurt you hurt all over. We spend so much time running around and taking care of everyone else that we don't have time to worry about our feet. But feet are the foundation of our body. Like the wheels of a car, if one of them is damaged, the car won't run properly. If one of your feet hurt, it can throw off your whole body.

Below are some frequently asked questions about foot pain:

Q. My feet ache all over at the end of the day. Is it because I am on them too much?

A. "There is no reason for your feet to hurt at the end of the day," said Dr. Kerry Zang of the Arizona Institute of Footcare Physicians in Mesa. "Our feet are designed to handle the stress of everyday life, and pain is an indication that something is happening and should be addressed." If you start the day with your feet feeling good, and by the end of the day they ache, it could be due to repetitive stress or mechanical strain. He suggests to start with changing your shoes to see if that makes a difference. It may be as simple as an ill-fitting shoe. However, it may be more complicated. If the aches and pains continue, a complete exam should be performed. Often, imbalances in your feet can be corrected with orthotics, custom devices that easily fit into your shoes. "Just like glasses help you see better," explained Dr. Zang, "orthotics help your feet work better."

Q. I am having swelling and pain in the middle of my foot, it never moves and I don't remember hurting it. It has been about two weeks now; will it go away on its own?

A. It could be a tiny crack in your bone called a stress fracture. "Stress fractures occur when there is repetitive and prolonged stress on a specific bone in your foot," said Zang. This can occur in healthy individuals, though it most frequently happens to weekend athletes and is also common in peri- and post-menopausal women who may have some osteopenia, which is the forerunner for osteoporosis. A sudden increase in activity level can also result in a stress fracture. After proper evaluation, the foot should be rested and protected until healing occurs. Zang warned, "If you try to 'work through' the process, the stress fracture can become a frank fracture and become unstable leading to mal-alignment and permanent balance problems."

Q. It feels like I am walking on rocks, with or without shoes. What could be causing this?

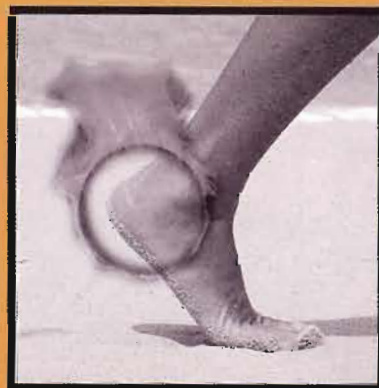
A. There are a few reasons for this. "The most common cause for feeling like you are stepping on a rock is a dropped or prominent metatarsal head," said Zang. The metatarsal head is the end of the long bones in your feet; they are the bones just before your toes and end in the ball of your foot. "Walking out of alignment or arthritis can cause the metatarsal to drop or become prominent," explained Zang. "It becomes painful with repetitive injury such as walking." It can actually feel like you are walking on the end of the bone. To establish an effective treatment plan, you need a complete foot exam. "Your doctor may suggest custom-made orthotics to help control the imbalances in

your feet," Zang said. "In some cases, surgery may be required to repair the structural abnormalities."

Q. I can be walking along just fine, and all of a sudden, I get a cramp between my toes. Why does this happen?

A. "This is a condition whereby the nerve can be caught between the bones in the ball of your foot," explained Zang. "It most likely is a neuroma which is like a pinched nerve." Often, you will experience an attack without warning, and you feel like you need to remove your shoe and rub your foot. "Sometimes, you might even feel a click when you rub your foot, which means that the nerve is inflamed and thickened, which causes pain," Zang said. Treatment is determined by the stage of the condition. It can range from changing shoes to injection therapy or surgical intervention. The earlier this condition is diagnosed and treated, the more successful conservative intervention is.

Pay attention to aches and pains in your feet as they are the first warning signs of a problem. Seek the advice of a qualified podiatrist. It is always better to deal with a condition when it first presents itself, before it becomes a bigger problem that may require longer or more invasive treatment.



Do you suffer from heel pain?

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