

Footwear

Our feet bear an enormous burden of daily living. As well as carrying the weight of our body, they must also twist and flex with increased impact and strain when we move around.

Even through simple day-to-day activities such as standing and walking, our feet can be injured if not properly supported. Shoes play a vital role in this, as well as protecting our feet from external dangers.

The Ideal Shoe

There is no such thing as the one perfect shoe. Feet come in all shapes and sizes. Men, women, children, athletes and older people all have different shoe requirements, and these vary considerably from activity to activity.

When you buy new shoes, it's important to make sure:

- they fit properly
- they are supportive for the kind of activity you engage in
- they do not cause damage to your feet or hurt in any way.

The Importance of a Good Fit

Choosing shoes that fit well is an important part of caring for your feet. Finding the right fit may mean you have to look at a few different styles to accommodate your particular foot shape.

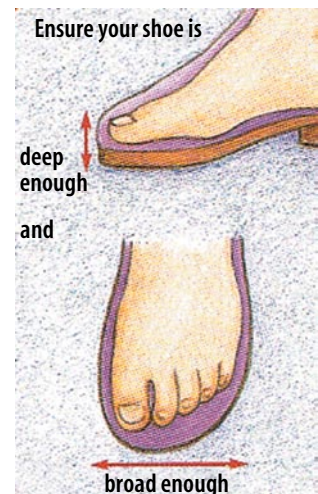
Because feet are rarely the same size, it is important that you fit your shoes to your largest foot. An experienced footwear sales person can help you with this. However, since most shoe manufacturers have their own size range, you should make decisions on what feels right.

People who have misshapen feet from an injury or medical condition such as arthritis or diabetes, may require shoes with extra depth or width. Some people may require orthoses (inserts).

Occasionally a custom-made shoe will be most suitable. These should be prescribed by a podiatrist.

Some tips:

- Your toes should not touch the end of your shoes or you may damage your nails and toes—you need a gap of about 1cm at the end of your longest toe.
- Shoes should also be broad enough and deep enough. If you can see the outline of your feet pressing against your shoes, they are probably the wrong fit.
- Don't buy shoes that need breaking in. Shoes should be comfortable immediately.
- Shop for shoes later in the day—most feet tend to swell during the day and it is best to fit shoes when your feet are largest.



Shoe Buying Tips

When buying new shoes, keep in mind the following:

- **Materials:** Leather is preferred for shoe uppers. Synthetic or rubber soles are best for the sole as they are generally more durable, shock absorbent and provide better grip than leather.
- **Security:** Shoes should be secured on the feet with laces, straps or buckles—especially walking shoes. If your feet have to work to hold your shoes in place, your foot muscles may be strained.
- **Shape:** Pointy shoes can make your toes 'claw'. This can affect overall body posture and cause back pain. Clenched toes can cause rubbing, leading to corns and callouses. Broad-toed shoes prevent the feet from cramping, but must be secure so the foot doesn't roll.

Also check the following:

- **The heel of your shoe is less than 2.5cm (1 inch)**—High heels increase pressure on the ball of the foot.
- **Your shoes have a well-padded sole**—A cushioned sole absorbs shock and reduces pressure on the feet.
- **Your shoes are made from a material that breathes**—Fungal infections such as tinea love a warm moist environment. Absorbent socks can help with drawing moisture away.
- **Your shoes protect you from injury**—Your feet must be protected from your immediate environment. People with diabetes and circulatory problems need to be especially careful that they do not injure their feet.

Footwear at Work

If you work in a field that increases the chance of injuring your feet, safety shoes are vital. Safety shoes and boots protect your feet, help prevent injuries and reduce the severity of injuries that occur in the workplace.

How Your Podiatrist Can Help

Podiatrists are highly skilled foot 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.

Regular visits to your podiatrist can help prevent recurrences of heel pain and other associated foot problems.

Health Funds

Many health funds in Australia provide cover for podiatry services on their ancillary tables and government funded services are available through the Department of Veterans' Affairs, some public hospitals and community health centres.

Please note: The information in this document should not be used as a substitute for podiatric or medical attention.