

General Footwear Advice

Information for patients



Podiatry Department

What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet gives advice about selecting footwear. Poorly-fitting footwear can cause various problems. A well designed shoe can offer support and protection which may prevent future problems developing.

Good fitting shoes

Wearing poorly-fitting footwear for prolonged periods of time may lead to foot deformities. It can also result in painful toenail and skin problems.

If you have been provided with insoles (orthotics) it is important to take these with you when purchasing footwear to ensure there is ample room and that they fit correctly.

A good fitting shoe should be long, deep and wide enough for your feet. If they are too tight, short or lacking in depth, they will rub your toes.

To keep a slip-on shoe in place, you clench your toes which can cause painful skin, nail, muscle, and joint problems. Shoes with straps or velcro fastenings will give your feet ample support. These fastenings will help to keep your feet securely in place and reduce your risk of falls. Slip-on or loose fitting shoes do not offer support and can cause the skin to rub.

The heel should be no more than an inch high. A higher heel forces you to put too much weight on your toes and forefoot which is damaging to your skin as well as the bones and joints of your feet over time.

Choose a shoe with a thick, rubber sole. This will help to cushion and protect your skin and joints more than footwear with very thin or hard soles. It should be difficult to bend the shoe at each end using your hands. If the shoes are very easy to bend the sole is too soft and not supportive enough. The bottom of the shoe should have good grip to help prevent slips and falls.

Shoes with softer materials over the tops of the toes are a good choice for patients with toe shape changes, such as clawed or hammer toes and those with bunions.

Helpful tips

You should have your feet measured properly, but if this isn't possible you should try shoes on before buying them.

You should always try them on both feet to check the fit of each. It's normal for one foot to be a slightly different shape or size to the other. If this is the case, then select a shoe which fits the bigger foot.

Be aware that shoe sizes can vary between shops and styles. Your foot size can also change over time; it may be that you need to try a few sizes and shapes to find a good fit for you.

Wear socks with your shoes to ensure good hygiene and to protect your skin from friction and blisters.

Check your shoes for wear and tear and repair or replace them quickly.

