

footprints

An informational newsletter for patients of APMA member podiatrists

Fall 2009

Start Back-to-School Shopping on the Right Foot

Fall is here and the kids are heading back to school. And of course, everyone wants new shoes. While the latest styles may be what your kids are screaming for, you may want to remember some important tips before letting fashion take a front seat to practicality and safety.

Kids come in all shapes and sizes and so too do their shoes. Shop at stores with experienced sales people that feature a wide selection of footwear styles, sizes and widths. Do not assume a given size will fit the same for different brands of shoes. Avoid man-made materials (like rubber and plastic) because they limit breathability. Hand-me-down clothes are great—but not shoes. Once you've purchased those new

shoes, remember to check them every several months, since kids' feet grow rapidly.

While flip flops are all the rage for the beach and the pool, they can create problems in crowded school hallways and getting on and off the school bus. While it may not be easy to coax your kids out of flip flops for school, it's safer for them to wear a shoe with more support. Your podiatrist

can recommend some great options for teenagers that may fit the bill in the fashion area while still providing support and comfort throughout the day.

If your children will be participating in sports this fall, send them onto the field or the court with properly fitted shoes that are designed for that specific sport. Basketball shoes, for example, are designed for quick stops and starts, and ankle support, while a football cleat needs to serve an entirely different purpose. Let the shoe fit the sport and try to get help when choosing shoes for each sport. •

Orthotics 101: How They Can Help You

Orthotics are custom molded devices which are designed specifically for your feet and then placed in your shoes. They are intended to correct abnormal foot biomechanics. They perform functions that make standing, walking, and running more comfortable and efficient by altering the angles at which the foot strikes a walking or running surface. Doctors of podiatric medicine prescribe orthotics as a conservative approach to many foot problems or as a method of control after certain types of foot surgery; their use is a highly successful, practical form of treatment.

Orthotics take various forms and are constructed of various materials. They fall into three broad categories: those that primarily attempt to change foot function, those that are primarily protective in nature, and those that combine functional control and protection. Orthotics can be categorized as rigid, semi-rigid, and soft.

The so-called rigid orthotic device, designed to control function, may be made of a firm material such as plastic or carbon fiber and is used primarily for walking or dress shoes. It is generally fabricated from a plaster mold of the individual foot. The finished device normally extends along the sole from the heel to the ball or toes of the foot. It is worn mostly in closed shoes with a heel height under two inches.

The semi-rigid orthotic provides for dynamic balance of the foot while walking or participating in sports. Each sport has its own demands and each sport orthotic needs to be constructed appropriately with the specific sport and athlete in mind. This functional dynamic orthotic helps guide the foot through proper functions, allowing the muscles and tendons to perform more efficiently. The classic, **continued . . .**

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Orthotics 101 *continued . . .*

semi-rigid orthotic is constructed of layers of soft material, reinforced with more rigid materials.

The soft orthotic device helps to absorb shock, increase balance, and take pressure off uncomfortable or sore spots. It is usually constructed of soft, compressible materials, and may be molded by the action of the foot in walking or fashioned over a plaster impression of the foot. This orthotic usually extends from the heel past the ball of the foot to include the toes. The advantage of any soft orthotic device is that it may be easily adjusted to changing weight-bearing forces. The disadvantage is that it must be periodically replaced or refurbished.

Various other orthotics may be used for multidirectional sports or edge-control sports by casting the foot within the ski boot, ice skate boot, or inline skate boot. Combinations of semi-flexible material and soft material to accommodate painful areas are utilized for specific problems.

Only a licensed health care professional can diagnose and prescribe medical treatments, including orthotics. There are some outstanding over-the-counter products which your podi-



atrist may recommend as an interim treatment, but remember that you will want the advice of your podiatrist before buying these devices from a retail store, since wearing the wrong type of insert can be detrimental to feet, especially for people with diabetes or arthritis. •

My Feet are Tingling: Could it be Neuropathy?

If you are a patient with diabetes, you may want to talk to your podiatrist about diabetic neuropathy. Neuropathies are a family of nerve disorders that can be caused by diabetes. People with diabetes can, over time, develop nerve damage throughout the body. Some people with nerve damage have no symptoms. Others may have symptoms such as pain, tingling, or numbness—loss of feeling—in the hands, arms, feet, and legs. Diabetic neuropathies often manifest in your feet and may even be the first sign that you have developed diabetes.

The longer you live with diabetes, the more likely it is that you may develop neuropathy. Furthermore, this problem becomes magnified if you have difficulty controlling your blood sugars. However, some patients with diabetes never develop neuropathy and have no symptoms at all. Mild cases of neuropathy may go unnoticed for many years—and remain untreated. Symptoms of numbness, tingling, or burning should be brought to the attention of your



podiatrist as there may be treatments available to help alleviate these sensations.

If you and your podiatrist discover that you do have neuropathy, there are a number of things you can do to keep your feet healthy:

- Check your feet every day and if necessary, use a mirror to view the bottoms and sides of your feet. Call your podiatrist at the first sign of swelling, redness, cuts, infection, or abnormalities.
- Make sure that your shoes are free of any debris before sliding them on. Even a tiny stone can cause damage.
- Have your primary care physician check your feet during each general visit. If a problem is identified, the physician will refer you to your podiatrist.
- Choose the right shoes. Shoes that are too tight or that rub can cause problems that can develop into serious health concerns.
- Wear white or light colored socks so that you can see if any blood or fluid from a sore may have developed during the day.
- Always wash your feet in lukewarm water. Dry them carefully, especially between your toes, and use products such as creams and powders that have been approved by your podiatrist or have the APMA Seal of Approval.
- Do not walk barefoot, even at home. You never know what may be lurking on your floors and in your carpets.
- Visit your podiatrist frequently to make sure that your diabetes is under control and that your feet stay healthy. •