

[IMAGE]

Time to Take a Stand Against Work-Related Foot Problems

By Mark Charrette, DC

Prolonged standing is associated with an increase in frequency of distal lower pain symptoms, most notably in the lower leg or calf, and the ankle or foot for both men and women. Fortunately, work fatigue and musculoskeletal symptoms in the same areas can be significantly decreased with the use of flexible, shock-absorbing shoe inserts. Even in patients with no need for specific foot or back treatments, supportive insoles can improve energy levels at work and help reduce subjective reports of tiredness.

The NYC Police Study

Researchers from the Division of Orthopedics at the New York College of Podiatric Medicine were interested in studying working-class people who spent considerable portions of the workday on their feet. They found that police officers – most of whom wore stiff-soled work boots – made excellent subjects for testing the effects of wearing shoe inserts during the workday.

One hundred twenty-two New York City police officers were recruited for this study. They wore semi-custom, flexible insoles for five weeks, for an average of seven hours per day. They walked an average of three miles per day for the duration of this study. The officers were all in good health, and any who were currently receiving treatment for back, leg, or foot problems were excluded from the study.

high heels - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark The insoles used in this investigation were semi-custom, in that they were designed for either low-arched, normal-arched, or high-arched feet. Responses to questionnaires collected before, and then after the five-week study were used to quantify the officers' foot problems and symptoms, and their satisfaction levels, in order to measure the effects of the supportive insoles.

Study Results

Before the study began, one-fifth of the police officers reported that they regularly experienced foot pain or discomfort at the end of their work day; 15 percent had calluses, corns or athlete's foot; 18 percent had sought treatment for a foot problem in the past; and 20 percent had worn foot orthotics at some point

previously. After five weeks of wearing the semi-custom insoles, there was a significant reduction in tiredness in the feet at the end of the day, with 68 percent reporting less foot discomfort. At the end of the study, 70 percent of the officers said they planned to continue wearing the insoles.

In addition, the shock-absorbing insoles were found to be very comfortable, and they significantly helped decrease both fatigue and foot symptoms at work, as well as after the work shift was over for the day.

Other Findings

A similar study demonstrated lower oxygen consumption and improved energy levels in healthy women who were fitted with flexible orthotics and tested on a treadmill. During walking, their heart rates and blood pressures were consistently lower than the control group, which did not receive shoe inserts. In this study, the inserts were built based on a "weight-bearing, functional position" image of the foot, and included support for the medial longitudinal arch.

Take Care of Your Feet

Standing and walking on concrete and other types of rigid flooring during working hours is a significant source of both foot discomfort and spinal complaints. Whether it is considered a workplace improvement, a wellness initiative, injury prevention, or simply providing needed support for the weight-bearing musculoskeletal system, orthotics should be considered for everyone who spends a large part of their day standing and walking on concrete, asphalt or rigid flooring. Talk to your doctor of chiropractic for more information.

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