[IMAGE]

The Agony of the Feet

By Dr. Kevin M. Wong

Have you taken a good look at your feet lately? Try it now - I mean it. Slip your feet out of your shoes, take off your socks and give your feet a good look. What do you notice? Are there any calluses, corns or bunions? Do your feet look red or do your toes look cramped and pushed together? When you compare your two feet, do they look different from one another? Your feet have a story to tell, and it’s time you listen.

Many of us go through life and do not realize the impact our two feet can have on our overall health. The feet are our foundation, and it is important to make sure that foundation is level and well-supported. Do you know how many arches your feet have? Most people would say one per foot. But did you know that you have three? The three arches are the inner arch, the outer arch and the arch under the forefoot.

To give you an idea of the connection the feet have with your spine and the rest of your body, stand up with your legs comfortably apart and put your hands on your hips. Now roll your feet inwards as far as you can and hold that position for a few seconds. Do you feel the pressure on the inside of your ankles, your inner knees, your outer hips and perhaps even your lower back? Now roll your feet back to being level again. Do you notice how the pressure on those joints decreased as you did this?

Woman who has been wearing high heeled boots massaging her foot. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Rolling the feet inward caused the arches of your feet to drop or collapse toward the ground. You were re-creating a scenario that occurs in more than 80 percent of the world’s population. This phenomenon is called excessive or overpronation. If you have ever heard a runner describe themselves as a "pronator," this is what they are referring to. Overpronation happens in eight out of 10 people who are walking around our planet every day.

Now, some inward rolling of the feet is normal, but for many of us, the dropping of the arches is so serious that it causes pain and problems in the feet, ankles, knees and/or the lower back. Some of these joints may even be causing pain for you. I will describe a few common conditions and what you can do to help yourself. At the very least, it will give you new appreciation for your feet.

All of the conditions described below can come from a variety of sports and activities that require you to be on your feet. Even simple everyday activities like walking through the halls of your home or workplace can create foot problems. See if any of the following conditions applies to you.

Treating Foot Problems

From what you have learned thus far about the arches of the feet and some of the problems that can affect them, it is obvious that something must be done to help. Long-term problems will result from any of these conditions if the proper treatment is not sought. Here are possible treatment options to give you an idea of how to help yourself and when to seek help from a professional.

- **Have your chiropractor adjust your feet.** If you have never had your feet adjusted by your chiropractor before, you don't know what you are missing. Aside from helping to support your three arches by getting the bones to move back to where they should be, it feels great.

- **Ask your chiropractor about flexible, custom-made, three-arch foot inserts (orthotics).** Since the connective tissue under your feet is now permanently stretched out to some degree, you need the support from now on. Once you get the inserts, wear them appropriately. You want to keep your feet stabilized so they don't get any worse.
- **Do exercises.** Keep the underside of your feet loose by rolling a racquet- ball, tennis ball or golf ball under them. Thirty seconds, twice a day will help keep your feet more relaxed and stretched.
- **Get supportive shoes.** Wearing a shoe that fits properly and offers the best support will help keep your feet from overpronating.

Calluses and Corns

Illustration of the inner structure of the human foot and ankle. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark

Calluses are toughened areas of skin that have become thick and hard as a response to repeated contact or pressure. Corns are specially shaped calluses that can be soft or hard, depending on the type of pressure and location on the foot. If you look at your own feet, the usual places you find calluses and corns are on the tops of your toes, the balls of the feet and the bottom surfaces of the foot and heels.

In the average person, as the three arches start to collapse and drop to the floor, the foot gets longer. This causes the toes to touch or rub on the end of the shoe. The increased pressure on the tops or bottoms of the toes and feet can then cause corns and calluses to form.

Ankle Sprains

Almost all of us have had a sprained ankle at least once. I am sure you remember how painful it was. Sprained ankles commonly occur because someone was performing an activity and they probably "turned their ankle" the wrong way. But did you realize that the 80 percent of people whose arches are already collapsing have a *higher risk* of getting sprained ankles?

Remember when you stood up and turned your feet inward? Do you remember the pressure you felt on your inner ankles? Well, that type of pressure occurs to some degree in people who excessively pronate every time they walk or run, which makes an ankle sprain more likely due to the forces placed on it when they play sports.

Achilles Tendon Injury

The Achilles tendon is a large tendon at the back of the lower leg and heel that allows the calf muscles to connect to the heel. A combination of excessive foot pronation and too much running, walking or weight-bearing activities can cause the muscles to pull on the tendon with too much stress. This can cause pain along the tendon or at the heel where it attaches. Inflammation and swelling also can result.

Heel Spurs

Any type of a spur is actually extra bone that has been growing in response to stress placed on it, usually by a tendon. In the cases mentioned above, the under-side of the heel of the foot is a very com-mon place to get a spur. The back of the heel is another place a spur can form.

Remember that spurs will form as the body’s natural response to pro-longed stress. If a tendon of a muscle pulls on a bone long enough, extra calcium will be laid down. The bigger the spur, the longer the stress has been placed on the bone and the longer the problem has been there.

Plantar Fascitis

This condition involves the main piece of soft tissue underneath your foot. It is called the plantar fascia - a very thick tendon that connects your heel to your forefoot. It provides the main support for the bottom of your foot. So, when your three arches start to fall or collapse over time, the plantar fascia gets pulled on and stretched out. The pull on the heel can cause heel pain, which can travel down the length of the plantar

fascia along the bottom of the foot to the forefoot. This discomfort can be extremely severe; in its worst form, it can feel like burning pain going across the bottom of the feet. For some people, it can be incredibly painful every time they stand up.

Bunions

A bunion is an enlargement of bone or tissue (a bony knob) and is commonly located at the base of your big toe and pinkie toe. You also may find that your big toe turns inward toward your second toe on either or both feet. Bunions form because as your inner foot arch and your forefoot arch collapse, the foot becomes wider and the bones at the base of your big toe and little toe can rub against the edges of your shoes.

Bunions have the ability to get quite painful and large, depending on how much pressure they experience and how tight your shoes are. Often, bunions can appear red, usually indicating something has been pressuring them. Hopefully, after reading this article you are more aware of the problems that may be caused by your feet. Talk to your chiropractor if you are experiencing any of these symptoms, and get some help. Remember, your feet are telling you a story. Are you listening?

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