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## OPINION COLUMN

# Proper foot care important to healthy disposition

Melissa Carr, 24 hours

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Walking in flip-flops or high heels, pounding the pavement for work or pleasure, or standing in line at the grocery store, your feet are probably something you don't think much about unless they're painful.

So why do feet hurt? With 26 bones and about 100 ligaments, tendons, and muscles, all in a relatively small space, feet are complicated structures. Consider this, walking and running cause the equivalent of someone hitting the sole of your foot with a hammer using up to three times your body weight with every step.

As with any pain, discovering the cause is a first step to treatment. Pain on the sole of the foot upon first step in the morning, with pain gradually lessening with further steps, may be plantar fasciitis. If your big toe is swollen and red, but you haven't stubbed it or dropped anything on it, it might be gout. Tingling or burning pain or numbness could be peripheral neuropathy.

Food can be medicine. A diet that restricts animal products, alcohol, high-fructose corn syrup and saturated fats, but includes cherries and other dark-coloured fruit, and eight to 16 glasses of water, can help with gout. If peripheral neuropathy is caused by diabetes, managing blood sugar levels is key. Enjoy turmeric, ginger, fatty fish and flax seed oils, as they can assist with inflammatory conditions such as osteoarthritis, tendonitis, plantar fasciitis, and bursitis.

Proper footwear is an obvious solution. In addition to increasing and concentrating impact forces on the feet, high heels also shorten the calf muscles and tighten the Achilles tendon, possibly contributing to heel spurs and plantar fasciitis. High heels might seem sexy, but the hammer toes and bunions that result, are not. Appropriate footwear for the right activity is more than a fashion issue. Consider the fit, support, cushioning, and breathability.

Stretching and exercising the feet is another treatment and preventative action. Use your feet as more than a platform. Stretch them, trying to create as much space between your toes as possible. Try to pick up pencils or marbles with your toes. Stand tiptoe. Stretch your calves. Practice standing on one foot (hold onto support, if needed); if that's too easy, do that with movement and/or your eyes closed.

Pursue treatment. Acupuncture, biopuncture, supplements and herbs can help reduce inflammation, speed healing, and reduce pain.

Finally, consider the emotional. Is there something in your life that you cannot stand?

*Melissa Carr is a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, caring for patients in an integrative medicine clinic in Vancouver.*

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