

NO MORE ACHING FEET



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Fall is on the horizon....soon the weather will be comfortable enough to take a walk. Did you know that the average person will walk between 150,000 and 200,000 miles in their lifetime--six to eight times around the earth? With 26 bones, 33 joints and scores of muscles and tendons, your feet are a feat of engineering and should be properly maintained.

Few of us are immune to foot problems, especially as we age. If you have Parkinson's, you can also add the challenge of gait disturbances and **cramping**. Due to the rigidity encountered with the disease, cramping may even have been your first symptom of Parkinson's. Foot cramping appears to be more common in the young onset. Rigid muscles are in a constant state of contraction and cramping is just one of several dystonias (abnormal, sustained tightening of muscles) that occur when the brain gets either too much dopamine (a peak-dose dystonia) or too little dopamine (a wearing-off effect).

Considering that, a discussion with your physician might be your next step toward solving the problem. Changing your dose of Sinemet or dosage schedule, using Sinemet CR or selegiline (Eldepryl) may help. Cramping can be especially annoying when it interferes with your sleep. A bedtime dose of Sinemet CR, or adding a dopamine agonist, may help prevent foot dystonia during the early-morning hours.

Cramping can also result from low levels of potassium and calcium. If your blood levels are normal, the best solution to the problem might be the simplest. Apply heat from a hot water bottle or heating pad after gently massaging your foot or calf muscles.

When you massage your feet, consider using reflexology, a technique that dates back to ancient China, 4000 or more years ago. The practice of reflexology divides the soles of the feet and hands into sections that mirror the different internal body organs and uses massage to heal, stimulate and strengthen these areas. Reflexology charts show that the ends of the toes are the connection to the brain.

Personally, I find that pulling my foot inward toward me will relieve a calf cramp. A friend maintains her cramps disappear in a minute when she bites hard on her lower lip and pinches her upper lip with her fingers. She explains this is a trigger point for those muscles, but it could be her lips hurt so much she forgets about her leg. You could try it next time and see if it works for you.

Choose your shoes carefully.

Considering how much we depend upon our feet and how much they do for us, it's only fair that we should pamper them a little. We often put them in poor-fitting shoes and still expect them to bear our body weight and take us where we want to go.

From the time you are born, your feet are constantly changing. Many of the foot flaws you're born with can worsen when you wear the wrong shoes. And, if you've ever had your toes bend in a claw-like position inside a tight shoe or watched your foot turn inward, then you'll know this annoying symptom can even make it difficult to *wear* shoes

So, how do we choose the right shoe? First consider the construction. Leather is best because it breathes like skin and molds to your foot. It may be difficult for you to pick up your feet with Parkinson's. Having a sole that can slide on the floor will help prevent falls. Soles should be strong and flexible. Insoles should be cushioned to help absorb the jolt of walking on hard surfaces. Having arch supports will help distribute your weight over a wider area and a rigid shank gives you added support.

With every walking step you take, your heel absorbs one and a half to two times your weight. The American Podiatric Medical Association recommends that heels be no higher than one half to three quarters of an inch because high heels can cramp the toes, change your body posture and possibly give backaches.

Next, consider the fit. Know the shape of your foot. Do the parts of your foot look as if it will fit in the shoe? Be sure your new shoes are comfortable *before* you buy them. Don't plan on shoes stretching with wear. (If you do own shoes that are too tight, take them to a repair shop to be stretched.) Go shopping late in the afternoon when your feet are swollen. Feet spread with age, so every time you buy shoes, have both feet measured while standing. Be sure to try on both shoes and stand up and walk around. If your feet vary slightly in size, always choose the most comfortable size for the larger foot. The ball of your foot should rest on the widest part of the shoe. The heel should fit snugly and not slip. The instep should not gape open. The toe box should allow you to wiggle all your toes without pushing against the top of the shoe. The space between your longest toe and the inside of your shoe can be up to one-half inch.

Many common foot problems such as bunions, hammertoes, and Morton's Neuroma (a pinched nerve) are caused by ill-fitting shoes. Calluses or corns, occurring when your foot presses against your shoe or when two foot bones press together, should be smoothed with an emery board or pumice stone and lubricated and softened. You also run the risk of pain and infection from ingrown toenails which can become embedded in the skin of the foot from tight shoes.

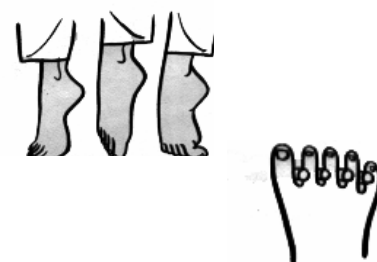
In addition to your shoes, the three other basic ingredients to the health of a normal foot are cleanliness, trimmed nails and exercise. A healthy toenail will be pink with a short white moon-shape rim. To keep from bruising your toe if it hits the end of your shoe, keep your toenails short and clipped straight across the nail bed.

Toenail fungus, yellowing, darkening and possibly thickening of the toenail, is contagious and should be seen by a doctor. Athlete's foot, itching, burning and flaking of the skin, is a fungal infection that can be solved with over-the-counter remedies and by not wearing the same pair of shoes two days in a row.

Your feet have thousands of nerve endings so consider getting a good foot massage. It not only feels wonderful, but is especially effective in relieving stress and tension. When you put your little foot down, you don't want it to hurt. The following exercises will help you keep your feet in shape. Treat them well. They're worth it

FOOT EXERCISES

1. Toe raise, toe point, toe curl. Hold each position for five seconds and repeat 10 times. This helps cramps and hammertoes as well.



2. **Toe squeeze.** Place small corks between your toes and squeeze for five seconds. Repeat 10 times. This one is also good for hammertoes or toe cramps.



3. **Marble pickup.** Place 20 marbles on the floor. Pick up one at a time with your toes and put each marble in a small bowl. This is recommended for people who have pain in the ball of the foot, toe cramps or hammertoes.

4. **The golf ball roll.** Roll a golf ball under the ball of your foot for two minutes. This is a great massage for the bottom of the foot and arch strain as well as cramps.



5. **Towel curls.** Place a small towel on the floor and curl it toward you, using only your toes. You can increase the resistance by putting a weight on the end of the towel. Relax, then repeat this exercise five times. This one also helps with any pain in the ball of your foot and over-all strengthening.



6. **Big toe pulls.** Place a thick rubber band around both big toes and pull them away from each other, toward the small toes. Hold for five seconds and repeat 10 times.



7. **Toe pulls.** Put a thick rubber band around all of your toes and spread them. Hold for five seconds and repeat 10 times.

