

# ALL ABOUT FEET

By Paola Feher

Plantar fasciitis, Morton's neuroma, cramps, bunions. The list of foot ailments is long and painful. No matter your age, gender or activity level, chances are at some point in your life you will have experienced some amount of foot pain.

Many foot ailments arise from the shoes we chose to wear. High heels create a constant contraction of the calf, and add force to the ball of the foot. Pointed shoes create severe compression in the ball of the foot as well as deformity in the toes. And then there are all the athletic shoes we endure: ski boots buckled down tightly for maximum force transfer to the ski, climbing shoes that "fit like a glove", biking shoes that attach to our pedals so that all the force of the body is exerted onto a quarter sized spot. All of these situations create a squeezing of bones towards one another, thereby compressing muscles and nerves and restricting blood supply to all areas of the foot.

Our feet support the weight of our entire body for hours on end, and they are so small! Each foot contains 26 bones and 31 joints. Compressed bones and joints create pain.

Creating space and proper alignment in our feet is paramount to foot health.

Let's take some examples. Plantar fasciitis is a very common ailment that can create discomfort on the underside of the foot, especially near the heel. The fascia (a layer of fibrous connective tissue) on the plantar, or underside, of the foot is sometimes swollen

and red. This fascia is often severely contracted, pulling the ball of the foot towards the heel of the foot, creating a painful cramping sensation on the sole. Recommendation? Create space! How? Try the following: Sit on your heels

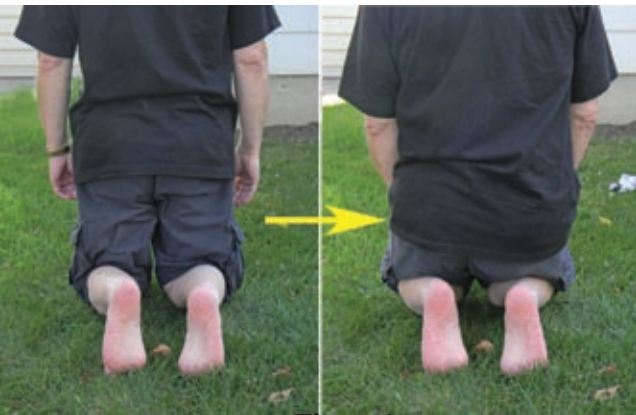


Figure 1

with your toes curled under (figure 1). Also, step on and massage the sole of the foot with a tennis ball (figure 2). Both of these exercises



Figure 2

create space between the heel and ball of the foot.

Morton's neuroma can be debilitating. Usually found in the ball of the foot between the 3rd and 4th toes, it can also be found, less commonly, between the other toes and can spread to more than one area. It is a thickening of the nerve tissue and can feel as mild as discomfort, or as painful as a sharp, shooting, stabbing sensation accompanied by numbness in the toes. While doctors will sometimes surgically remove this bundle, it can also be pried apart by deep manual therapy and exercises. Recommendation? Same 2 exercises as above. In addition, manual therapies are needed to pry apart the



Figure 3

toes. It is difficult to treat these neuromas by oneself, partly because they are so painful.

Foot cramps most often stem from a contraction of the calf muscle. If the aforementioned exercises don't help, add a calf stretch using a stair or step (figure 3).

Bunions are a deformity of the foot caused by the big toe drifting in towards the other toes,

and creating a large, painful bump on the outer edge. As with all situations, the sooner the drifting of the toe is detected and treated, the better the chance of halting the problem and recovering. Using a ball on the base of the foot and toes as well as manual therapy are good treatments for this condition. Since tight and ill-fitting shoes are commonly the problem leading to bunions, changing shoe choices is a must.

The upshot? Be kind to your feet. They hold you, support you, carry you and take you. Try not to shove them into tight quarters, but if you must, then make sure to counterpose afterwards by stretching them out with the 3 suggested exercises. And if you have a specific case of foot pain that you would like to resolve non-surgically, please



contact me for a consultation. Here's to a world of happy feet!

*Paola Feher founded Bozeman Center for the Healing Arts in 1997 after receiving her master's degree in biomechanics. Her training emphasizes observation of human bodies in motion, focusing on performance,*

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