



Putting Your Best Foot Forward

By Mark Beatty

All too often we take for granted pain-free movement and activity. Anyone who has experienced acute toe pain or chronic heel pain knows that pain-free movement is not something to be taken for granted. Foot pain may not be life threatening, but it does have a significant impact on a person's quality of life.

The joints of the foot and ankle are essential for normal walking and they have the ability to act as shock absorbers when we run and jump, and also provide stiffness and rigidity to move quickly without wasting energy. A healthy foot's unique ability to serve these different functions is incredible. When our feet work as intended they are foundational in our lives, but when they cause pain it can derail bigger goals. Take for example a client that has been advised by their doctor to undertake a walking program as part of a strategy for weight loss and to manage blood pressure. When new activities or exercise programs are started there is risk for fussy pains to arise. Being forced to stop a fitness program right when progress is being made can be a terribly deflating experience.

A physiotherapist's education provides the foundational knowledge in anatomy and biomechanics necessary to evaluate the foot and how it works with the rest of the body. To address a painful foot, physiotherapists can offer a variety of treatment options, including manual therapy techniques to treat stiffness and movement restriction, and progressive exercise to stretch tight structures and strengthen muscles. Additional exercises focused on improving balance and control can be used to reduce reinjury risk and to improve athletic performance. Physiotherapists can also suggest alternative activities and exercise options to pursue while issues with the foot are improving due to treatment.

Equipment is another component of care that physiotherapists can help with. The wrong shoe can be a major contributor to foot and ankle issues, but the correct shoe has the potential to reduce pain and increase activity in clients with chronic foot pain. Shopping for the right shoe to help your unique feet can be overwhelming with so many choices and complex features. Having a discussion with your physiotherapist about basic shoe design and what to look for in a shoe can result in happier feet. Physiotherapists can also help with braces and foot orthotics, which can facilitate recovery from foot injuries, protect healing tissues, and optimize foot mechanics.

Physiotherapists can assess how your foot and ankle fits into the bigger picture of how your body works. In some situations, a foot and ankle issue can create problems in the knee or hip. The reverse is also true. Physiotherapists make sure you are moving well by paying attention not just to specific parts of your body, but also in how they work together.

Nothing is more important than a plan! After a thorough discussion and examination, your physiotherapist can work with you to set achievable goals that are specific to you, and outline a plan to help you put your best foot forward!

Mark Beatty is a Physiotherapist at Pan Am Rehabilitation Services. You can find Mark and many other great physiotherapists in the find a physiotherapist section of our website www.mbphysio.org

