

Q. Can the right shoes really help reduce foot pain?

A. Olympic ice skater Nancy Kerrigan and tough-guy Mr. T have something in common. They're both celebrities. They're both paired up with professional dancers on *Dancing with the Stars*. And they're both bound to experience more foot pain than normal before they even make it to the finals. Flats, high heels, and super-star moves on the stage can take a toll on your feet.

But you don't have to be a dancer to have foot pain. In fact, about 8 in 10 adults are living with foot pain, according to a recent survey.¹ And your shoes may be to blame.

- Are your feet tired and achy?
- Is walking painful, or at least uncomfortable?
- Do your heels, knees, back, and hips ever hurt?

Your shoes may be the problem. For some people, foot pain is always there. For others, it comes and goes. And it can limit your activity level. Half of all adults with foot pain find it hard to walk, exercise, play with their kids, or do their job at work.

Many feet-related problems start with poorly-fitted shoes. The wrong shoes can lead to heel pain, corns, Achilles tendonitis, bunions, hammertoe, and ingrown toenails (issues you see a doctor for).² Shoes can even be the source of knee, hip, and back pain.



Choose the right shoe

You're probably not going to get tapped for the next season of *Dancing with the Stars*. But you may be thinking about wearing a flashy pair of shoes or high heels. Stop right there. If you want to keep your feet happy, fit and comfort should come first. And you don't need to sacrifice style for comfort. Here are some tips to help you find the right shoe:³

Buy a shoe that fits. Shoe sizes vary by brand and among styles within brands. Shoes designed for specific activities (basketball, running, hiking, etc.) can help, too.

Try on both shoes. It's common for one foot to be larger than the other. Fit to your larger foot. Inserts can be added to the shoe of your smaller foot for a better fit.

When possible, buy shoes that fit your arch – whether it's low (or flat), high, or medium.

Go shoe shopping in the evening. Feet swell throughout the day.

Wear the kind of socks or stockings you plan to wear with the shoes you're trying on.

Stand and walk around when trying on new shoes. There should be about a half inch between your longest toe and the end of the shoe (1 inch for athletic shoes). This is about the length of the tip of your thumb. The shoes should bend where your foot naturally bends. Also check for heel slipping.

Measure your foot (length and width) at least once a year. Your feet change sizes as you age and sometimes after pregnancy.

If the shoe feels tight or otherwise uncomfortable, put it back in the box and look for a wider shoe or different style. Never buy a shoe expecting to "break it in." It's a recipe for blisters and other foot problems.

A good pair of shoes will feel good when you try them on and keep your feet happy for a long time.

References

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2. Hurst, B., et al. (2017). *Medical-grade footwear: the impact of fit and comfort*. **Journal of Foot and Ankle Research**, [doi: 10.1186/s13047-016-0184-z](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13047-016-0184-z).
3. Harvard University. (2014). *10 tips for finding the right shoes*. Harvard Health Publications. Accessed on March 15, 2017 from <http://tinyurl.com/kdk8upr>.

