

by age 50,

the average American woman has logged approximately 75,000 miles – on foot. Each step we take involves an intricate network of bones, muscles, tendons and ligaments. That complexity - combined with all the weight they carry accounts for why feet can be so prone to problems.

## CARING FOR YOUR FEET

"The best way to prevent future problems is to take good care of your feet now," says Stephanie Sanders, DPM, a Park Nicollet podiatrist. That means keeping your feet clean and dry, rotating your shoes so they have a chance to air out, exercising your feet and taking care to avoid issues like ingrown toenails. Even if your feet are healthy, it's a good idea to be on the lookout for changes that could signal an issue. Bumps, curling of the toes or pain should be checked out by a doctor. Other changes are normal, and caused by aging and wear. Those may include a slight flattening and widening of the foot, a thinning of the heel pad and slight stiffening of the foot and ankle.

## FIND YOUR FIT

Appropriate footwear can not only keep your feet in good shape, but may also help problems from becoming more serious. Look for shoes with arch support and good shock absorption. "If it's not a comfortable shoe, you probably just shouldn't wear it. Options such as flip flops and ballet flats do not supply adequate support, and may cause foot-related issues," says Anne Moore, MD, a sports medicine doctor at TRIA Orthopaedic Center. "Some athletic shoes don't have enough support, so you may want to consider a gel insert. And if you're a runner, be sure to get new shoes every 500 miles or six months even if they still look good, they may have lost much of their support."

## **BUNIONS AND BEYOND**

A bunion is a bone prominence at the big toe joint. Wearing wide-toed shoes or toe spacers may help alleviate some of the symptoms, and an orthotic (custom made shoe insert) can help a bunion from worsening as quickly as it might otherwise, but the only way to correct a bunion is surgically. If you are having pain despite simple treatments, or if your toes are drifting toward the outside edge of the foot or starting to lift and curl (hammer), you may want to consider surgery.

Another common foot issue is plantar fasciitis, which is thought to be caused by repetitive microscopic tearing and inflammation of the plantar fascia (a thick ligament on the bottom of the foot). The best way to treat the heel pain caused by plantar fasciitis is by providing arch support to decrease inflammation near the heel, and stretching the heel cord and plantar fascia. Orthotics can be helpful when over-the-counter arch support isn't enough.

To learn more about how our experts can help you keep your feet fit for life, visit parknicollet.com/podiatry

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