

the feet

THIS DYNAMIC DUO SUPPORTS THE WEIGHT OF YOUR ENTIRE BODY. STEP UP AND LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR FEET. BY KATE DALEY

Three things you didn't know about your feet:

1 Back pain might be connected to your feet. The health of your feet can affect parts of the body such as your knees and spine, says Jeffrey Cowen, a chiropodist, foot specialist and owner of the JD Cowen Foot & Ankle Clinic in Toronto. If you're not walking properly, your body overcompensates, affecting alignment in other areas.

2 Cold feet could indicate a larger medical issue. Your feet are farthest from your heart, so blood flow issues such as numbness, pain, tingling or swelling may indicate a condition such as hypothyroidism, heart disease or diabetes. Those with diabetes may have circulation issues that can impair their bodies' immune response to injury and subsequent healing. **Interesting fact:** Having hair on your feet often means you have good circulation.

3 Women's and men's feet are different. Women typically have more heel pain and forefoot problems because their feet are anatomically different from men's, says Cowen. Forefoot pain is also exacerbated by wearing high heels, which put 50 percent more pressure on the ball of the foot.

1/4 of your bones are in your feet.

WALKING puts two times the force of your body weight on your feet. And if you run, that force increases to three or four times.

Foot care dos and don'ts:

DO stretch your feet, calves and shins. The intrinsic muscles in your feet are important stabilizers, but your calf and shin muscles are responsible for much of your foot's movement. Gently roll your foot over a tennis ball or water bottle for two or three minutes, once or twice daily. Cowen suggests rotating your ankles in both directions morning and night to engage the muscles from your shin tendon to your foot.

DON'T live in heels or flats. It's a common misconception that flats are better for your feet than heels. Though high heels put too much pressure on the ball of the foot, flat shoes can affect your overall alignment. Flip-flops are a definite no-no—they lack support and don't offer foot protection. The ideal heel height is one to 1.5 inches. The best option for everyday footwear? Running shoes.

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