

footprints

An informational newsletter for patients of APMA member podiatrists

Fall 2007

Starting the School Year on the Right Foot

Now that the fall season is here, students are reluctantly trading in their sunblock and swimsuits for books and backpacks. Now is the time for parents to outfit their children for back-to-school, and new shoes are at the top of everyone's list. The American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA) and your podiatric physician recommend that you follow these simple guidelines to make sure that your student is outfitted correctly and stylishly:

- Since children's feet change rapidly as they age, measuring before purchasing shoes is imperative. Every shoe fits differently, and sizes vary by brand and style. Try on shoes before purchasing, and make sure they are comfortable from the start. Shoes that are too tight can cause blisters, calluses, or corns.
- Shop for shoes with your kids later in the day. Feet expand when you walk, and they tend to swell throughout the day. If you buy shoes in the afternoon or early evening, they will tend to fit all day long.

Prepping for Fall Exercise

Fall is often a transition period for many exercisers. Those in the colder climates start to head indoors as the weather cools and the conditions outside become less conducive to outdoor exercise. In the west, however, many who were exercising indoors due to the extremely high temperatures will be more comfortable outdoors again. Whatever direction you're headed, here are some reminder tips for indoor and outdoor exercise.

See your doctor before beginning any exercise regimen. A visit to your podiatric physician can help you determine if you're getting the optimal result from your body, specifically from your feet and ankles. An exam by a podiatrist can determine if you are excessively pronating (turning your feet inward) or supinating (feet leaning out) and whether a prescription orthotic can give you relief from heel pain, ankle strain, and shin splints.

Stretching before and after any aerobic activity can help prevent injuries. Check with your podiatrist to determine the best stretching exercises for your particular sport. Since muscles that haven't been properly prepared tend to be injured more easily, make sure to start out with some light cardiovascular activities, such as easy jogging or brisk walking, just to get your muscles going. Stretching after the muscles are slightly warm will help you maximize your overall workout.

Drink plenty of water while working out. Drinking water will help reduce your chance of becoming dehydrated. Even when the weather cools down significantly, it's also important to stay hydrated. •



- Bring socks or tights that fit the shoe. While the temperatures may still be steamy now, shoes bought for fall will probably require your student to wear socks or tights this fall and winter.
- Check shoes for quality. First look for a stiff heel counter by pressing on both sides of the heel; it should not collapse. Next, check for flexibility. The shoe should bend with the toes and should not be too stiff or bend too much. Finally, check to see if the shoe is rigid in the middle. It should never twist. Remember that a shoe's cost is not the best indication of quality. Look for footwear that carries the APMA Seal of Acceptance.
- Try to avoid "hand-me-downs." Just because shoes fit one child comfortably does not mean they will fit another the same way—not to mention that sharing shoes can spread athlete's foot and warts.
- Make sure to schedule a back-to-school visit for your child with his or her podiatrist. A quick foot check can ensure a great start to the new school year for all kids. •

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Look Out Below!



As cooler temperatures approach, many of us are changing our exercise routines and either moving indoors to tracks and treadmills or outdoors to trails and paths to keep up with our walking routines. But before you head out for a stroll, consider the type of surface and terrain that you'll be walking on. Concrete and asphalt can be hard on your bones and joints, while uneven terrains such as hiking trails, although soft, can make you more vulnerable to twisting

injuries such as ankle sprains. Wherever you walk, it's important to have the appropriate shoe gear that provides your foot with protection, control, and stability.

Indoor tracks and treadmills provide excellent shock absorption and are forgiving on joints and bones. However, if you're walking on a track, be sure to change directions periodically so that you have even pressure on both feet. Your outdoor running or walking shoe will provide excellent support indoors as well. Your podiatric physician can make recommendations for you regarding the best shoe for any surface.

On outdoor trails, especially in wooded areas, you have a higher risk of injuries. Slow your pace so you can navigate the uneven terrain. You may want to choose a shoe with more ankle support. On the beach, never run or walk barefoot. While the beach can be easier on your bones, the risks here are greater, so caution with the sand is important.

Asphalt surfaces are somewhat forgiving. If you are walking on a road, however, walk against traffic so drivers can see you, and wear bright, reflective clothing. Walk or jog on sidewalks whenever possible. Many roads are "canted" or angled to the curb. Running or walking on these roads can contribute to imbalances leading to injury or fatigue.

Concrete is the hardest surface to walk on, sometimes up to ten times harder than asphalt. Limit the amount of time you walk on concrete, and make sure that your shoes are in good shape and still have all their cushioning intact. Alternate walks on all surfaces if possible to keep your feet safe and happy this season. Of course, if you have any problems or concerns, your podiatric physician can be your best resource for information and treatments. •

Back to School—Back to Sports

As kids head back to school, they also get back into participating in team and individual sports. While advice on conditioning and equipment may be available at some schools, other schools may not have the resources available to offer your kids the best advice. Parents should be concerned about children's involvement in sports that require a substantial amount of running, jumping, and turning (like soccer and basketball), or involve contact (like in football).

Sports-related foot and ankle injuries are on the rise as more children actively participate in sports. This focus on fitness is outstanding, but parents need to be vigilant to make sure their kids are getting the best advice on how to stay injury free. For example, protective taping of the ankles is often necessary to prevent sprains or fractures. To learn more about the best methods for staying healthy on the field, a visit to your local podiatric physician can give parents and kids peace of mind and tips for staying healthy. A podiatrist can offer suggestions on conditioning prior to and during the season and can even design custom-made orthotics, which can improve performance by optimizing foot function.

A visit to the podiatric physician can also provide information on the best choices for shoes and cleats. Each sport requires a different type of shoe, and your podiatrist is well versed in the options available.

Take the time to schedule a visit with the podiatrist for each of your children this fall, regardless of whether or not they will be participating in a sport. The advice you receive and the tips offered will take you and your kids into the new school year with happy feet. •

