

Steps for Strong and Healthy Feet



Your feet are your foundation. Keeping them strong and mobile helps you stay active and prevent falls as you age. These steps show you activities you can do to help your feet.

Step 1: Check Your Feet Regularly

- Make it a habit to **look at your feet** often yourself.
- Look for any changes, pain, or discomfort.
- Being aware of your feet helps you find problems early.

Step 2: Choose Shoes That Help Your Feet Move

- Pick shoes that **fit well** and allow your feet to move naturally.
- Look for shoes with a **wide toe box** so your toes can spread out. This is important for balance and preventing problems like bunions.
- Choose shoes with a **minimal heel-to-toe drop** (the difference in height between the heel and the front). This can help improve foot and ankle strength and flexibility.
- Balance stylish shoes with foot health. It's okay to wear fashion shoes sometimes, but do foot exercises to help your feet.

Step 3: Do Foot Strengthening Activities

- **Weak toes** are a big predictor of falls when you age.
- Doing foot exercises daily helps make your feet strong and improves balance.
 - **Try Toe Yoga:** Sit down with one foot on a towel. Spread your toes wide and hold for five seconds. Then, scrunch the towel with your toes, lifting your arch while keeping the rest of your foot on the ground. Stop if you feel a cramp. Do this on both feet. As you get stronger, you can try this standing up or even shifting weight onto one foot. Toe yoga helps strengthen the small muscles in your feet.
 - **Try the Suitcase Carry:** Hold a weight in one hand. Stand tall and keep your back straight. Focus on keeping your foot grounded on three points: your heel, the base of your big toe, and the base of your pinky toe. Walk a short distance, feeling your foot and core muscles work to keep you balanced. Start with a light weight and slowly use more.

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Step 4: Spend Time Barefoot (When Safe)

- Spending time barefoot, especially on different surfaces like sand or grass, helps your feet get sensory information.
- This sensory input helps build muscle tone and can help the arch of your foot develop. This is especially important for children.

Step 5: Consider Minimalist Shoes Slowly

- Minimalist shoes are thin and flexible, designed to be like walking barefoot while giving protection. They can help strengthen foot muscles.
- If you want to try minimalist shoes, **transition very slowly**.
- Start with just **10 to 15 minutes a day**.
- Gradually increase the time you wear them over many weeks.
- **Do foot strengthening exercises** as you transition.
- **Stop** if you have persistent pain, swelling, or sharp pain.
- Only move to the next step if you can walk comfortably for 30 minutes without pain.

Step 6: Address Foot Pain Early

- Common heel pain (plantar fasciitis) is often caused by weak toes.
- Foot strengthening exercises can help this pain.
- Also, look at other parts of your body like your ankle, leg, and hip, as weakness elsewhere can affect your feet.

Disclaimer: The information provided in this handout is inspired by The Drive Podcast by Peter Attia, which covers topics that may extend beyond traditional physical therapy practice. Patients are encouraged to listen to the podcast (e.g., related to Episodes #128, and #296) for a deeper understanding. Matt Pechacek, PT, cannot be held liable for decisions made based on this information.