

# Teen feet

## Fashion victims — teens and fashion footwear



**F**rom flat-soled sneakers to strappy stilettos, teens are making choices about footwear that will affect their feet for life. The teenage foot is still growing and bones and tissue can be easily distorted and damaged by wearing shoes without adequate support. Fashion shoes cause minor injuries immediately and permanent damage in the form of collapsed arches, heel spurs and bunions.

Flat-soled sneakers from popular brands are usually too flat to provide enough cushioning between the hard surfaces we walk and run on everyday and the delicate tissue around the heel. This can result in a number of uncomfortable injuries such as blisters and calluses. Calluses can become painful around the heel and may need to be professionally removed if they become too tough. More serious than calluses are heel spurs. Heel spurs are deposits of calcium that build up below the heel bone due to excessive force being placed on the heel through wearing shoes with thin soles. Heel spurs can take a long time to heal and may keep you out of action for a while; severe cases require surgery to remove the spurs.

Another problem with very flat shoes is flattened arches. With no support to protect the arches, feet are more likely to roll inwards, leading to eventual flattening of the arches and major movement abnormalities. Try to buy sneakers with laces rather than elasticated sides to give more structured support to the arches and a thicker sole for more cushioning around the heel. If your teen insists on wearing fashion sneakers, see us to get some custom orthotics made; orthotics will provide the support to the arches that is missing in the shoes themselves and will help to prevent long term damage.

Ballet flats, popular with teenage girls, are another bad call when it comes to keeping feet healthy. The soles of ballet flats are usually so thin that the ground can be felt through them on first wearing, leaving virtually no protection between the feet and the unforgiving surfaces of concrete and bitumen. Add to that the lack of any sort of fastening in the form of straps or laces and the feet are in for a hard time. Wearers of ballet flats are subject to the same heel and arch problems as wearers of flat-soled sneakers, but are also at huge risk of toe deformities. The lack of any fastening means that the wearer has to scrunch up their toes to grip the shoes as the only means of keeping them on. This constant toe scrunching can lead to corns, calluses and permanently clawed toes, creating a lifelong struggle to find shoes to fit deformed feet.

Teen celebrities don't do their fans any favours by wearing inappropriate footwear, and even celebrity children have been photographed wearing high heels. Towering heels may look fabulous, but they do a tremendous amount of damage to the feet — particularly growing ones — including pain in the ball of the foot, arch pain, calluses, corns and bunions. Once bunions start to develop, growth can be slowed by following our advice. They will, however, be a lifelong problem and the surgical removal of bunions — a procedure that used to be performed only on older women — is becoming more common in young women.

Teens should have the chance to wear fashion shoes, but they should be saved for special occasions rather than everyday use. Make sure you understand the risks to your still-developing feet so you are aware of the choice you are making when you opt for fashion over comfort, and try to minimise the risk to your feet by using supporting devices such as orthotics and insoles with extra shock absorption. at work so you can keep your feet up at the office.

# Growing pains in teens

With estimates suggesting that over a third of children suffer from growing pains, many teens run into problems as they go through a major period of growth. Teens may experience three types of growing pains, one that is the same as for younger children and affects the front of the thigh and calf muscle, one that affects the back of the knee, and one that affects the heel. Teens with growing pains will have no joint problems and will be able to move normally.

Pain behind the knee can be attributed to Osgood-Schlatter disease, which is swelling of the tendon that slots into the knee bone. Teens may also suffer from Sever's disease, affecting the heel joint in much the same way. Sever's disease is caused by swelling of the cartilage that, once developed, will become the heel bone. Swelling is thought to be caused by the Achilles tendon, which inserts into the heel bone, and which may be shortened in comparison to the growing bones of the lower leg, placing strain on the heel joint.

Growing pains are hard to define and are usually diagnosed by a process of elimination. Other conditions that can be causing lower leg and heel pain include rheumatoid arthritis, infections, stress fractures and serious diseases such as leukaemia. Growing pains are a far more common cause of lower limb pain than any of these other conditions, however it is important that medical advice is obtained to rule out anything serious. The main symptoms of growing pains include pain in the heel, calf, knee or thigh; pain should be in both legs and will usually occur after a lot of sport and in bouts of a few days in a row up to a week, followed by a period of no pain for several weeks.

Growing pains will go away in time. Once the bones of the feet and legs are fully developed all symptoms of growing pains will fade. Massage and specific strengthening exercises can help to relieve symptoms, and in teens with Osgood-Schlatter disease and Sever's disease, rest is the best cure to ease pain. If your teen is suffering from pain in the legs or heel, it's worth getting them checked out by us. A full assessment will help and a podiatrist can supply custom orthotics or insoles with additional shock absorption to help support the heel and to provide stability for the tendons of the calf and thigh. Orthotics will help to reduce long-term damage to gait as a result of growing pains, which can have damaging effects for the knees, hips and spine.



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