Dear Worried and Awkward,

A person takes thousands of steps a day, so it makes sense that you’d want to put your best foot (position) forward in order to look and feel most comfortable. From your descriptions, it sounds as if you may have a case of "outtoeing," where the feet naturally turn out from the legs, similar to a ballerina’s stance.

Outtoeing can occur when the femur (upper leg bone) or tibia (lower leg bone) turns outward, causing the feet to appear spread out at a wide angle from each other. There are several causes of this condition, including fetal position in the womb before birth, an inherited tendency to walk this way, or sitting and/or standing in a particular position for extended periods of time. Outtoeing is most apparent during childhood and usually corrects itself without any special treatment. Your case may be one that was unnoticed or not corrected when you were younger, leading to its presence at your age.
Since there are several factors that may be responsible for your outtoeing, consulting with a health care provider or an orthopedist would definitely be a step in the right direction. S/he can run tests on the alignment of your legs, knees, and lower body, as well as collect other information about your posture and gait. This information can then be used to determine if your outtoeing is within the normal range and correct it if it's not. S/he can also discuss ways to reduce the foot and back pains caused by your walking and explore the possibility of an osteotomy (a surgical procedure that involves cutting the bones of the tibia or femur to allow them to realign).

The prospect of such a surgery may give you cold feet about speaking with a health care professional, but there may be other treatment options available to you. The sooner you seek help, the sooner you'll be comfortable in your own shoes!

Alice!
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If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

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