Dear Alice,

I've known I was flat-footed for as long as I can remember, but I don't actually know what health risks come along with this condition. It's supposed to be bad for my joints... my spine maybe... and while it's been convenient to blame my back pain or difficulty running on my flat feet, I'm not sure if those are legitimate complaints. What are the health effects of flat-footedness, and what should I do to correct them? I've never seen a podiatrist or anything like that.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Sounds like those flat feet of yours have become the archenemy!

In fact, it's all about the arches here (or in your case, lack there of). Flat footedness is a condition that occurs when the tissues connecting the joints in your foot (known as tendons) are not tight enough to create a strong arch. While most people's tendons begin to tighten in early childhood, people with flat feet have either not developed an arch at all or have developed only a slight one. This means that when you stand up, the soles of your feet rest entirely on the ground. So without that arch, your feet are flying sole-o!

Although it sounds like you've had flat feet since childhood, people can also develop flat feet as adults! This can happen simply as a result of time—after years of walking, running, and jumping, a person's tendons can become loose enough for their arches to fall.

Whether you've had flat feet forever or your arches have fallen as an adult, this condition can lead to poor alignment of the ankles and knees, which can result in bodily pain. This means that your complaints about back pain and difficulty running are totally legitimate! While many people with flat feet report no problems, symptoms like the ones you've described are not uncommon. People with flat feet might also experience pain in their heels, legs, and toes, or swelling along the inside bottom part of the foot.

Don't worry though, there are several ways to ease your discomfort. If you notice swelling or pain after doing certain activities, try icing your feet and staying off of them for a couple hours (movie marathon, anyone?). You might also consider using an over the counter pain reliever, such as ibuprofen, that can help reduce inflammation. If you feel like going for a jog, avoid running on concrete, which can put more pressure on your feet. Try running on grass instead,
or switch up your workout and take up yoga or swimming.

In terms of footwear, you want to make sure that any shoes you wear provide enough support for those flat feet of yours. In some cases, shoe inserts might help. You can find shoe inserts at many drugstores, or you can visit a podiatrist who make recommendations or may fit you with orthotics (a customized type of shoe insert). A health care provider might also show you specific stretching techniques that may help with any discomfort.

Take care of yourself, and just remember that learning to work with those flat feet can be quite a feat in itself!

Alice!

Related questions

- Pain in the calf
- Shin pains from walking?
- Achilles tendon injury
- Lower back pain?
- Back-strengthening and stretching exercises

Resources

- Medical Services (Morningside)
- Medical Services (CUMC)

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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.

Source URL: http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/what-do-about-flat-feet

Links