



A sharp pain in the heel could be a symptom of plantar fasciitis

# Time to heel

Aging, wearing ill-fitting footwear, and the stress of carrying you around all day can take a mighty toll on your feet. Find out how you can take better care to get that spring in your step again

**Parita Patel**  
mirrorfeedback@timesgroup.com  
TWEETS @MumbaiMirror

**F**eet can change structurally over time, resulting in painful conditions like bunions and hammer toes, and they are also susceptible to bacterial and fungal infections. All of these can result in discomfort and affect your quality of life, but it doesn't have to be that way. Here are some common foot-related problems and what you can do to find relief.

## Achilles tendinitis

While, for many of us, the very mention of 'Achilles' will no doubt still conjure up images of a buff Brad Pitt (he played the hero from Greek mythology in the 2004 film *Troy*), the Achilles tendon is actually a band of tissue that connects the calf muscle to the heel bone. It helps us to walk by facilitating the raising of the heel. When this tendon gets inflamed, it results in a condition called 'Achilles tendinitis'.

"People who engage in activities like running and dancing regularly develop tight calf muscles," says physiotherapist Pallavi Singh. This is an overuse injury, meaning that the band of tissue that connects calf muscles at the back of the lower leg to your heel bone has been strained. "And, women who wear heels for eight to 12 hours every day can also develop Achilles tendinitis over time," says Singh, explaining that the condition is characterised by pain — which may be either a mild or severe ache in the back of the leg or above the

heel, how acutely the band has been strained.

**What would help:** Warm up your calf muscles before wearing heels, or engaging in an activity like running. "Physical therapy can include calf and hamstring strengthening exercises like calf raises and stretches — as these would then reduce the stress on the Achilles tendon. Soft-tissue massage would also relieve the pain," says orthopaedic surgeon and sports medicine specialist Dr Yajuvendra Gawal, who believes it's vital for people to re-educate themselves on what constitutes the correct gait while running.

## Bunions

A bunion is an inward angulation of the big toe. The big toe is made up of two joints, the largest being the metatarsophalangeal joint (MTP), that is, where the first long bone of the foot (metatarsal) meets the first bone of the toe (phalanx). This joint is where bunions develop.

The incline tends to increase with time, making it painful to wear some shoes, or even to walk, at times. "While the condition can be inherited, it can also be caused by wearing narrow, closed and pointy footwear for long hours as doing so shifts the body's weight to the front of the foot," says Singh.

**What would help:** In most cases, bunions are treated without surgery, with things like braces, toe-separators and splints. Although such treatments will not reverse the condition, they may slow down its progression, and reduce the pain. "Orthotic slippers — engineered to ease the pressure on bunions and



Long hours in high heels could lead to Achilles tendinitis

thereby reducing the weight on the bunion," says Singh. Dr Gawal adds that footwear with ample cushioning for the sole can also be similarly beneficial.

**Make it a point to change your socks after every workout; never repeat them, thinking that the sweat has dried up as this could cause a fungal infection known as athlete's**



## Ingrown toenails

Toenails that grow into the nail fold, pierce the skin and continue to grow into the skin can result in swelling, pain and sometimes even infection, says Dr Gawal. "These can occur if you aren't careful while trimming your nails. They can also be caused by shoes that don't fit the feet properly, and by toe injuries," adds Singh.

**What would help:** Oral anti-inflammatory medications and antibacterial ointments may be required. But, most often, doctors would recommend soaking the affected foot in warm water three to four times daily, for a few days. "This would soften the skin around the toe and stop the nail from growing into it further. Your doctor may also recommend elevating your foot, and certainly you'd need to switch to comfortable footwear, preferably sandals," says Singh.

## Corns

"Corns and calluses are usually caused by friction and pressure. They could, for instance, occur when the toes rub against the insides of shoes that are too tight. This leads to a build-up of hard tissue — called a corn or callus (when on the sole or the sides of your feet) and it can become very painful," says Dr Gawal.

**What would help:** Cushioning and padding devices that redistribute the pressure on the affected area can help prevent the formation of corns and calluses, says Dr Gawal.

"Depending on the severity of the condition, doctors may advise sufferers to soak their feet in lukewarm, soapy water, and to use a pumice stone to gently remove the build-up of tissue in order to relieve pressure at that point. Or, they may prescribe medicated creams to soften the corns, which would facilitate their removal. In extreme cases, surgical interventions may be required," says Dr Gawal.

## Athlete's foot

This is a fungal infection caused by moisture — usually perspiration — that forms between or around the

toenails that grow into the nail fold, pierce the skin and continue to grow into the skin can result in swelling, pain and sometimes even infection, says Dr Gawal. "These can occur if you aren't careful while trimming your nails. They can also be caused by shoes that don't fit the feet properly, and by toe injuries," adds Singh.

**What would help:** Oral anti-inflammatory medications and antibacterial ointments may be required. But, most often, doctors would recommend soaking the affected foot in warm water three to four times daily, for a few days.

"This would soften the skin around the toe and stop the nail from growing into it further. Your doctor may also recommend elevating your foot, and certainly you'd need to switch to comfortable footwear, preferably sandals," says Singh.

## Plantar fasciitis

A sharp pain in the symptom of plantar fasciitis which tends people (usually after or so). "It is most caused by prolonged walking or running, result in micro tears fascia ligament — it extends from the he says Dr Gawal. "Wh which supports the the arch of the foot, stretched, this l resulting in pain," t that the pain often when one wakes up ing, and it's usually exercising, rather th workout.

**What would help:** people ignore plant because after they w minutes, the pain ei significantly or disa But if you suffer fro condition, the pain back the next morn this continues for a of time, the body m for the injury by cal deposition on the f heel spur — which ( excruciating," says l

He recommends ful area and stretch and recommends th their feet adequately; your footwear if req customised orthotic offer arch support s

5/10/2019

Time to heel - Mumbai Mirror, 5/10/2019

heel, depending on how often the activity has been repeated, and

hammer toes are also useful because they support the foot's medial arch,

**foot**

— Dr Yajuvendra Gawai, orthopaedic surgeon

toes, and is left there for prolonged periods. Dr Gawai says the condi-

sure on your feet m- ed more evenly," sa-