

footprints

An informational newsletter for patients of APMA member podiatrists

Winter 2010

Rock and Roll on Your Feet

Tone your legs! Strengthen your core! Improve your posture! These are some of the claims made by athletic shoe companies now producing toning shoes. Some of these claims might be right on the money, but before you put down the big bucks for the newest fad in shoes, you may want to have more information.

There are actually several different types of shoes that may employ some instability or a rocking motion:

- Toning shoes may look odd but utilize various designs to force the core muscles in your body to work harder to obtain balance.
- Mild rocker shoes are not meant to improve posture or balance. They reduce strain on the heel and toes by allowing you to roll normally with each step.
- Unstable rockers have an unstable heel designed to force you to change your center of gravity and posture and stand up straighter.
- Stable and medical rockers are great for reducing certain motion in the toe joints or off-loading pressure from a particular area of the foot. These are mainly prescribed by podiatrists to treat arthritis or pain in the ball of the foot, diabetes, and plantar fasciitis. They also may be prescribed for use after surgical procedures.

The original rocker bottom shoes were designed by a Swiss engineer and were called MBT, for Masai Barefoot Technology. The shoes were designed to mimic the rolling motion from heel to toe that the Masai people typically have in their barefoot gait. Once MBTs caught on, other shoe companies followed with their own toning footwear. In fact, toning shoes are the fastest-growing shoe category since the 1970s.

Rocker bottom and toning shoes can change your walking or standing posture. They can change how you walk, and the muscles of the body adjust and compensate. Because you will be using new muscles, your podiatrist might recommend that you wear these shoes for shorter walks or on alternating days for cross training. In some patients, rocker bottom shoes can cause injuries such as Achilles tendinitis or ankle sprains. But in others, the slight adjustment in gait can help tone and strengthen muscles. However, it is important to remember that anyone who already has an unstable gait should be very cautious about using these types of shoes.



Most doctors agree that if these shoes can get people motivated to walk, thereby improving their health and fitness, they are worth the money. However, make sure to check with your podiatrist, who can recommend the best shoe for you for any activity. Also, be sure to start wearing them in gradually, and stop immediately if any pain or discomfort develops.

A number of toning shoes, sandals and boots have been granted the American Podiatric Medical Association's Seal of Acceptance. A complete list of the footwear with the APMA Seal can be found on the APMA website (www.apma.org).

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Cold Feet? Not So Cool

If you suffer from chronically cold hands and feet, the winter weather may not be your only concern. Raynaud's phenomenon (RP) is a common, benign vascular disorder characterized by episodes of constriction of very small arteries in the toes and fingers, usually in response to cold temperatures or stress. Symptoms in the fingers and toes include unusual paleness and/or a red or bluish color to the skin. Occasionally other parts of the body are affected including the nose, ears, and/or tongue. RP does not usually occur in association with any other underlying disorder and may also be referred to as primary Raynaud's disease.

RP most frequently affects women, especially in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. The causes of RP are unknown. Commonly, RP manifests itself when you see your fingers and toes go through a three-phase color sequence. Initially, the digit(s) involved turn white due to a diminished blood supply. They then turn

blue because of prolonged lack of oxygen, and finally, the blood vessels reopen, causing a local "flushing" phenomenon, which turns the fingers and toes red. This sequence (white to blue to red), most often occurring due to exposure to cold temperatures, is characteristic of RP.

A secondary form of the disorder, known as Raynaud's disease, affects a small number of individuals and is usually found in association with another underlying systemic disorder. The symptoms are similar to RP; however, they tend to be more severe, and in rare instances, tissues may break down to form an ulcer. Your podiatrist is an excellent source for diagnosis and treatment.

People with Raynaud's phenomenon or Raynaud's disease should take extra precautions to protect themselves from cold exposure.

Today's Podiatrist: Here to Help You

APMA has developed a new, highly interactive website, with pages specifically designed for you, the patient. The Today's Podiatrist website, www.todayspodiatrist.com, has sections to help you learn more about your feet and how to care for them.

- Physician, surgeon, specialist: Did you know that all of these words describe your podiatrist? To learn more, visit the new website.
- Never heard of "plantar fasciitis"? Visit www.todayspodiatrist.com to find that definition and many others in a glossary of terms commonly used in podiatric medicine.
- "Ask the Expert" lets you ask questions on-line, and a Doctor of Podiatric medicine (DPM) will respond to your questions through an online Q&A forum.
- View a great new video titled "Meet Your Feet." This original and entertaining video can be shared with your friends on most social media sites.
- Playing with the interactive foot map is a fun way to find common conditions in different areas of the feet.
- There's also a great tip sheet to help you prepare for an appointment with your podiatrist. All you have to do is visit the site and print out your copy.

All of the tools on www.todayspodiatrist.com are designed with you in mind, so visit the site or ask your podiatrist for more information.



Doctors of podiatric medicine are podiatric physicians and surgeons, also known as podiatrists, qualified by their education, training, and experience to diagnose and treat conditions affecting the foot, ankle, and related structures of the leg.