



WHAT IS PODIATRY?

Committed to the health of your feet, podiatric medicine focuses on diagnosing, treating, and preventing foot and ankle problems, such as flat feet. Your podiatrist (doctor of podiatric medicine) is highly trained through years of study and clinical practice, including a bachelor's degree program and four years of podiatric medical school. Podiatrists may also have from one to three years of residency training, studying other aspects of foot care and surgery. Podiatrists continue to stay informed about the latest research and developments in the field.

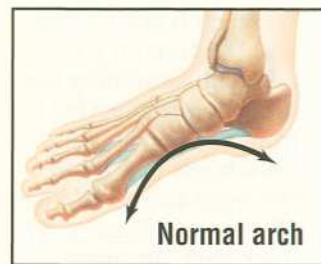
In treating your feet, your podiatrist may also work with your other healthcare providers to give you appropriate and comprehensive care.

Footnote

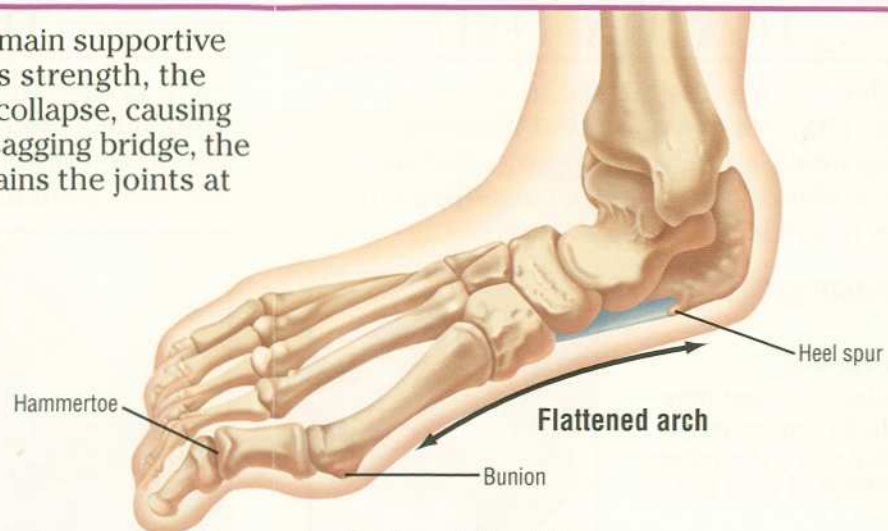
Flat feet can lead to problems with your ankles, knees, hips, or lower back.

WHAT ARE FLAT FEET?

The arch of your foot is its main supportive structure. If this arch loses strength, the bony framework begins to collapse, causing your foot to flatten. Like a sagging bridge, the weakness in the middle strains the joints at both ends of your foot.



Normal arch



Causes

There are many causes of flat feet. Some people are born with them. Others acquire flat feet as a result of arthritis, trauma, or musculo-skeletal disorders. Overuse or repeated pounding on hard surfaces can also weaken the foot's arch.

Symptoms

Discomfort from flat feet often doesn't appear for years. At some point, pain may be felt and walking may become awkward as increasing strain is put on your feet and calves.

Related Problems

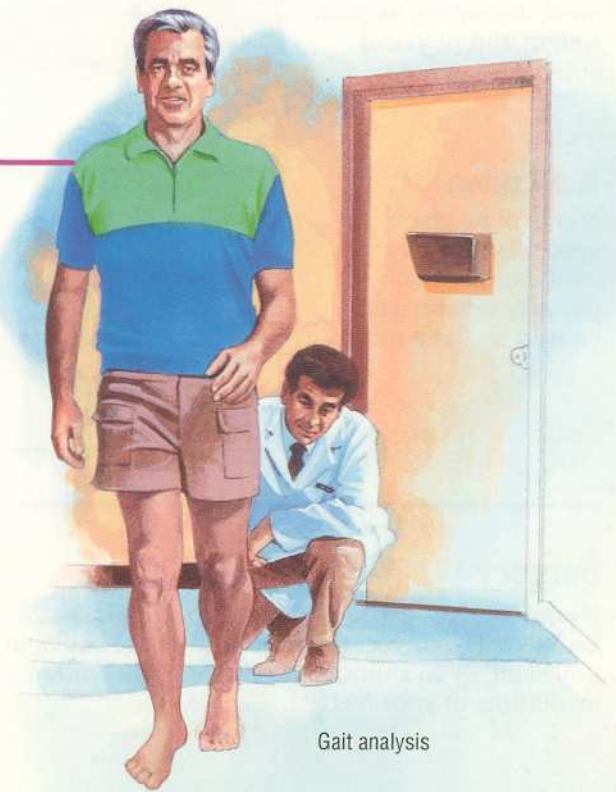
The excess strain from flat feet can cause other foot problems, such as hammertoes, bunions, heel spurs, arch strain, corns, neuromas, and sagging joints. Flat feet can also affect other parts of the body, causing fatigue, pain, or stiffness in the ankles, knees, hips, and lower back.

Medical History and Physical Exam

To determine the best treatment for your problem, your podiatrist looks at your medical history, such as any medical problems you may have had in the past. He or she asks about the length and frequency of your symptoms, the types of activities you do, and any pain or problems you may have in other parts of your body. Your podiatrist does a complete examination of your foot, including a gait analysis to observe the movement and stability of your legs and feet as you walk.

Testing

If your problem is severe and your podiatrist suspects a bone problem, x-rays may be needed. If other problems are suspected, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or computerized tomography (CT) may be done, which reveals cross-sectional images of soft tissue and bone.



Gait analysis

HOW DOES MY PODIATRIST TREAT FLAT FEET?

If flat feet are diagnosed at an early age, chances are good that nonsurgical treatment, such as strapping, custom shoe inserts (orthotics), or medication can help the problem.

Nonsurgical Care

Strapping

Taping your feet may help by temporarily maintaining the proper position of your feet.



Orthotics

Custom orthotics can readjust the weight-bearing position of your feet. Soft, semi-flexible, or rigid inserts may be used, depending on your weight and physical activity.



Medication

You may be given anti-inflammatory medication to temporarily relieve pain caused by flat feet.

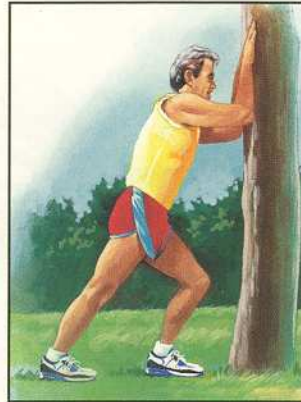


Surgery

If flat feet cause chronic pain, surgery may be needed to correct the alignment of the bones in your feet, or to support or reinforce the tendon structures in your feet.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT FLAT FEET?

To help ease the pain of flat feet, try the following as part of your daily routine. If you have continuing problems, be sure to see your podiatrist.



Stretching

To stretch your soles and tendons, try this: Lean on something stationary, with one leg in front of the other and both heels flat. Bend the front knee. Hold for 10 seconds. Bend your back knee, bringing the heel up. Hold for 10 seconds. Do this 5 times with each leg.

Shoes

Be sure your shoes are supportive and comfortable, with enough space in the toe box for toes to wiggle. Women should wear low-heeled shoes, not pumps.

Soaking and Massage

Warm-water soaks or ice massages can help relieve pain. But if you have diabetes or a circulation problem, talk with your podiatrist first.

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FLAT FEET

