

It's taken me twenty eight years to finally learn what to do for sore feet. Unfortunately I trusted in my doctors too readily to tell me what I needed to do. Little did I realize that they still don't know what to do for sore feet!!

## **OW!! MY FEET HURT**

In Grade 4, when I was 10, the school nurse sent me home with a note saying that I had flat feet. Nothing was done about it. I assumed that it was simply normal for me to have flat feet. I didn't realize until recently that every foot should have some arch to allow for proper foot functioning. Without it a spur of bone can get pulled out of the heel caused by constant inflammation of the over stretched arch tendon. This condition is called plantar fasciitis.

In 1980 as part of a complete check up for the Rice Program at Duke University my feet were x-rayed. Among other things mentioned, the doctor commented that I had heel spurs. At that time I knew nothing about what heel spurs were and the doctor did not explain further. In hind sight I should have asked more questions of the doctor. Having heel spurs is a problem that does need attention.

Part of my assignment for the Rice program was to walk twelve miles a day. Using a pedometer seven days a week I ensured that I walked at least my twelve miles for five months while I rapidly lost 88 pounds of excess weight. (Unfortunately not having solved the psychological causes of my obesity, I didn't keep the weight off for long, but that's another story.) without any pain little did I realize that I was compounding my heel spur problem.

Not until 1985 when I found myself limping in crippling pain with a sore right heel did I seek medical attention. My doctor sent me to a Podiatrist who took x-rays. Examining the films he pointed out to me that the spurs were now not only coming forward from my heel bone but also there were now spurs coming down from the sides of my heels. Made of bony calcium type material they looked like hooks. The Podiatrist taped my feet in a slightly arched position to take the pressure off of the fascia and made casts of my feet. From these custom fitted plastic orthotics were made to be worn inside my shoes. The orthotics raised my arch a little allowing my foot to gradually heal. I was so grateful to be able to walk again without pain although it did take a whole year for the pain to completely subside. When I changed my shoes I would transfer my orthotics to the pair I was going to wear.

In 1999 after moving to a new city I again began to experience discomfort and saw a new podiatrist. Again casts were made of my feet for a new set of hard plastic orthotic inserts. When I received them at last they didn't solve my recurring foot pain problem. So I made a second visit to the podiatrist who sent the orthotics away again to have an additional piece added to the metatarsal area. This change only made matters worse. Taking the advice of friends who ran a custom shoe store I was then directed to a local firm that

made orthotics of leather and cork materials. At last I found comfort, at least for a few years.

This spring, 2008, when once again I began to experience pain and stiffness in my left foot and ankle, I grudgingly went back to the podiatrist. Looking at me from across the examining room and without touching my feet at all .she said that my ankle was pronating (allowing my ankle to lean over slightly). With the prescription she gave for an ankle brace or orthotic I went back to the local orthotics firm. The orthotist suggested that my winter boots had not provided enough support for my ankle causing the problem. But this time several tries even with newer softer material did not lead to walking comfort. The orthotist offered that he had been able to eliminate his own need for orthotics by strengthening his feet and suggested that I should try doing some exercises to strengthen my feet and ankles.

Luckily this time I was directed to a sports medicine clinic. **I learned that having to wear orthotics is totally unnatural. That it is the same as a person having to walk with a crutch!**

The masseuse began vigorously working on my feet, right away pointing out that the talus bone in my left foot was jammed up and my ankle no longer was moving freely. She gave me a number of simple exercises to practice. She also worked on my legs and hip and knee alignment. Now in November I am still not free from pain but there is much improvement after over three months of work. My daily exercises and biweekly massage sessions are strengthening the muscles in my arches. The bone in my foot has been unjammed and my ankle now moves more freely.

Recently noticing improvement but not freedom from pain, I commented to the masseuse that it was taking a long time. She responded with an analogy

“How many steps does it take to go down to the basement?”

I answered “About 14”

She replied “Then why do you expect to get up the stairs in three?”

It is true, at my weight I have caused the heel spurs and ankle deformity to form over many years. I can't expect over night relief.

I certainly regret that the doctor who spotted the problem twenty eight years ago did not tell me what to do about it, but I suspect he didn't even know that exercise to strengthen the arches of my feet were required to solve the problem. Sadly even recently nor did the two podiatrists.

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