

Here are some remedies for common foot problems

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By DR. ROBERT WEIL Columnist

Last week on the Sports Doctor radio show, one of my guests was Bolingbrook podiatrist and foot surgeon Dr. Jeff Mackler.

Being one of my colleagues and best friends, Dr. Mackler and I discussed some frequently seen foot problems in both athletes and non-athletes. I want to share some of the topics we talked about.

My other guest was Dr. Brian Kincaid of Naperville Imaging and he and Dr. Mackler included the topics of MRI, diagnostic ultrasound and other high-tech methods of diagnosis and identification of soft tissue, tendon and ligament injuries of the foot and ankle.

Some conditions we mentioned were bunions, heel or arch pain and corns and calluses. All of these can slow down or stop athletic activities. Bunions are a non-medical term for the enlarged bump on the side or top of the great toe joint frequently associated with the migration of the big toe towards the other toes.

In previous articles, I've often mentioned that foot type is inherited. Dr. Mackler stated that "upwards of 90 percent of bunion deformity is genetic and that this condition is a progressive dislocation of the great toe joint."

Sometimes a surgical problem, I've found that often prescription orthotics can be very helpful in reducing bunion pain especially in adolescents. When we see the bunion deformity in parents and grandparents, we need to pay attention to the kids. It's the foot type and mechanics like flat pronated or high-arched foot types that are genetic often leading to the development of bunions. If these conditions and family histories are identified, then intervening with shoe changes and prescription orthotics can possibly slow down the progression of the bunion deformity and prevent future surgery.

Heel problems are one of the most common problems we see in active people.

Plantar fasciitis is an inflammation of the fibrous band on the bottom of the foot attaching from the toes to the heel. Sports activities of all types involving running and jumping are especially vulnerable to arch and heel problems. Both pronated or flat-type feet, and tight high arches can be involved.

Commonly, it's the attachment of the plantar fascia to the bottom of the heel bone that's irritated. Dr. Kincaid mentioned that "diagnostic ultrasound is an excellent dynamic test to identify any abnormality or injury to the fascia." He said that, "MRI can be used also, but diagnostic ultrasound, the same technology used to see the fetus in a pregnant woman, allows the fascia and tendons to be moved dynamically for more precise evaluation."

When heel pain is associated with foot mechanical imbalances, success with orthotics and physical therapy is very good, especially when the problem is persistent.

Corns and calluses are common problems.

Corns are the often painful buildup of hard tissue on the top or tips of the toes. They can develop as a result of hammer toes or knuckle toes. They can develop as a result of hammer toes or knuckle toes with resultant irritation and rubbing in shoes. Podiatrists can often painlessly trim these areas with great relief every month or two, but sometimes surgically straightening the offending toes is done to permanently solve the problem.

"Trimming these areas and keeping the athlete comfortable is often the choice if surgical correction has to be put off," Dr. Mackler said.

Calluses are also the buildup of hard skin but on the bottom of the foot. When calluses form under bony areas like under a metatarsal ball of the foot bone they can be painful. Trimming these calluses is very helpful but temporary. Some can be surgical problems.

Orthotics to redistribute weight away from painful ball of the foot calluses can be very helpful. These calluses under metatarsal bones are different from hard skin on the heels which might respond to creams or skin files.

Calluses under bony areas require the attention of a podiatrist.

For more details about the above topics, check out my Web site, click on to radio shows and give the above mentioned show a listen.

Free foot screenings continue to be available at my Aurora office. If you or your active kids are dealing with foot, ankle, shin or knee problems, especially if it's recurrent or persistent, pay attention to foot mechanics.

In sports, it all starts with the feet.

Wow, it's the Winter Olympics in Vancouver, Canada! Hey, Naperville's Even Lysacek, go get that Olympic figure skating gold medal! Good luck to all the athletes and go USA!

Dr. Robert Weil is a sports podiatrist from Naperville with an office in Aurora. You can hear him on his weekly radio show at 6:30 p.m. Thursdays on 90.9-FM. Contact him at drweilsportsdoctor@yahoo.com and visit his Web site at sportsdoctorradio.com.