Happy Feet

by Terri Trespicio

Get those tired, achy feet in shape- and wear any shoes you want-with our simple daily regimen

With sandal season on the wane, we'll soon face the grim chore of shoving our feet back into fall shoes. For many of us, foot woes start here. But according to body worker and health and wellness educator Yamuna Zake, bad shoes are, the only problem- nor do "good" ones offer the only solution. "If your feet are fit and flexible, You should be able to wear almost any shoes you want," she says. "The key is to stop relying on your shoes to take care of your feet and start taking care of them yourself."

When it comes to our fitness priorities, feet get very low billing. In fact, we often flat-out neglect them. "There's so much emphasis in the fitness world on full-body cardio and stretching-but no one's talking about feet," says Zake, creator of Yamuna Body Rolling which includes a foot fitness program dedicated to addressing and preventing problem feet while helping people move with greater ease. Your feet contain 52 bones (a quarter of all bones in your body), 66 joints and more than 200 tendons, muscles, and ligaments. This incredibly complex and dedicated structure bears an enormous amount of stress- and deserves more than just occasional attention.

"In every body step you take there's a moment when all your weight concentrates on the joint in the big toe, an area the size of a quarter," explains Manhattan based podiatrist is real Goldstein, D.P.M. "That stress adds up when you don't take measures to counter it through exercise." When you feet are bound up in shoes for too long he says, the bones and muscles begin to degenerate and weaken. Without proper attention the joints and tendons (Which should glide easily) can freeze up, causing the foot to lose mobility and functionality.

By practicing foot exercise you can stretch and strengthen your feet while helping to restore moment. "Most foot problems don't happen overnight," says Goldstein" Know the effects shoes have on your feet and alternate pairs. Exercise your feet and see a podiatrist to identify problems early on." In other words, take care of your feet as you would any other part of your body.
Balanced Fitness

Stretch

What the move does: Helps separate your toes after being squeezed together in closed shoes all day.

What you need: A Chair.

How to do it: In a seated position (in a chair or on the floor), take your right foot into your lap and thread the fingers of your left hand through the toes. Use your fingers to press gently into the webbing between each toe to relax tension in the muscles of your feet.

Strengthen

What the move does: Builds strength increases flexibility and circulation, and relieves tightness throughout the foot, especially in the heel and arch.

What you need: Though you can do this exercise with a soft, pink rubber ball (often called a "pinky" ball), you can also use Foot Walkers (at right $35 for a pair, Yamunabodyrolling.com) a pair of plastic Domes designed for strengthening and massaging the muscles of the feet.

How to do it: Place the feet waker under your heel and use your leg muscles to expert pressure into the center of the feet for 5 to 10 seconds. Rock back onto the heel and lift the toes, and then roll the foot back down. Next, put the arch of your foot on the Foot Waker and rock back and forth over it, again exerting pressure so that the entire width of the arch is in contact with the Foot Waker.

PUT YOUR FEET TO THE TEST

If you answer "no" to most of the following questions you may have reduced foot function.

Can you stand comfortably with feet parallel, without rolling them in?

Are the balls of your feet and heels bearing an equal amount of weight?
Can you feel the edges of your feet pressing into the floor?

Can you rise onto the balls of your feet and then roll them roll down gradually?

Can you rise your toes when you’re standing flat-footed, and then lower one toe at a time?

Can you pick up a pencil with your toes, or are they too stiff?