

The footwear you choose can help treat any Musculoskeletal (MSK) problems you may have. MSK problems are injuries or pain in the body's joints, ligaments, muscles, nerves, tendons, and structures that support limbs, neck and back.

This leaflet will give you simple practical information about what features to look for in your footwear to help treat your problem. You can use this leaflet as a reminder of the advice your clinician gave you at your consultation.

Your clinician will choose the design features you need to look for when selecting shoes to help your MSK problem.

What to consider

There are 2 things to consider when purchasing footwear:

1. The fit of the shoe which is how comfortable it is
2. The function which is how the design of the shoe effects the movement and function of your foot.

Fit

What is a good shoe?

- The shoe should be the correct length, width and depth for your foot.
- There should be 1 cm between the end of your longest toe and the end of your shoe.
- The upper should be soft with no hard seams or ridges and be made from a natural fibre such as leather which allows moisture to evaporate, or a breathable synthetic material which many walking shoes and sports shoes are made from.
- The shoe needs to hold your foot firmly in place with an adjustable fastening, i.e. laces, straps with buckles or Velcro.
- The front of the shoe should be round and deep to give the toes room to move.
- The heel should be less than 4cm high, broad and stable.
- The back of the shoe needs to be firm and fit snugly around the back of the heel. This helps to maintain and stabilise the heel in place as the shoe makes contact with the ground.
- Ideally the shoe will have a thick, lightweight, rubber sole of a non-slip material.

What is an unsuitable shoe?

- A "slip on" or court shoe which is kept on the foot by curling the toes. Slip-on shoes have to be wedged on to stay on the foot and this can damage the toes or cause corns and callus.
- A pointed toe box, which will squash your toes together and can cause changes to the shape of your bones or joints.
- A heel that is too high and will cause the foot to be pushed to the end of the shoe, crushing the toes.
- A shoe made of plastic or rubber, which is not breathable and will cause your foot to sweat.
- A thin, hard sole, which will not cushion your foot comfortably.
- Very soft flexible shoes which offer no support to the foot.

Other things to consider

Insoles

As part of your treatment you may be prescribed corrective insoles or orthoses within your shoes. These may be simple heel pads or insoles that protect a tender joint or a complex orthosis that corrects the way the foot functions. In order for this treatment to succeed, you must wear the correct type of shoe.

It is recommended that shoes to incorporate insoles should have:

- Increased depth at the toe and the heel
- Adjustable fastening
- No more than 4cm heel height
- A Removable insole to allow easy accommodation of the orthoses

Footwear for work

If you need to wear safety footwear to work it is the duty of your employer to provide these. If you are self-employed it is your responsibility to provide these.

If you are having problems with the comfort of safety footwear or they do not have the features your clinician recommended, ask your clinician for advice or speak to your employer to see if they can provide different footwear.

Price

Expensive footwear is not guaranteed to fit well and have the correct features. In many cases inexpensive shoes can have the same features as expensive ones. Concentrate on looking for the features your clinician has advised you to look for rather than be influenced by the price or appearance of the shoe.

Slip-on shoes or fashion shoes are generally less suitable to use with orthoses. As these shoes tend to have a shallow fitting, there may be problems fitting the device and the foot into the shoe at the same time.

Function

One or several of the features below can improve your condition either by reducing pressure on structures or by changing the way your foot and its muscles and tendons move and perform.

Your clinician will have assessed you to decide which functions of your foot can be improved by choosing specific features in your footwear. They can tick the boxes below to remind you of what to look for when buying shoes.

Features to choose to treat your condition:

Heel height:

Low 1cm

Medium 1.5cm

High 2cm

- Additional 1cm Heel Lift to be worn
- Increased width of heel
- Increased support around the heel and ankle (stiff counter)
- Medial support or stiffness in the arch to be avoided
- Dorsal Lacing –see separate guide
- Increased width and depth at 1st joint – no seams
- Removable insole to incorporate Orthosis
- Fastening Lace or Velcro
- Rockered Sole

Further Information

If you have any questions please ask your clinician.