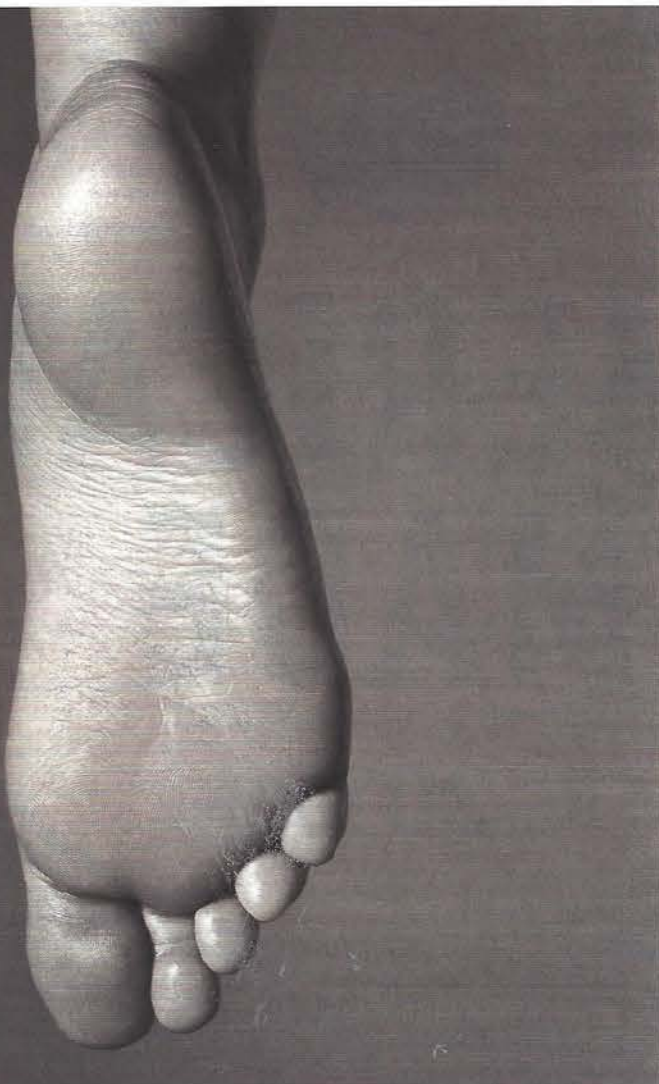


Each foot has about 100 muscles, tendons, and ligaments—keep yours strong with exercise. An effective move: Use your toes to pick up your socks.



STEP RIGHT UP

As sure as the day is long, sooner or later everyone's dogs start barking. To get to the bottom of your feet's aches and pains, we've rounded up the best feel-better-fast strategies. Most are simple; others will feel downright luxurious. Lemongrass soak, anyone?

TEXT BY SALLY WADYKA

YOUR FEET NEVER get a day off. You constantly stand on them, walk and run, and sometimes even squeeze them into heels and then pound the pavement—without a thought. “They’re amazing machines,” says David Levine, an orthopedic foot and ankle surgeon at New York City’s Hospital for Special Surgery. “When they work well, we take them for granted, but when they don’t, we feel it throughout our entire body.” And that’s because once pain arises, we shift our

gait to get more comfortable and end up straining other joints and muscles. Recognizing how hard your feet work is the first step to treating them right.

Buy new shoes. “Think of your feet as your wheels and your shoes as the tires,” says Mark Manuel, a biomechanical specialist at the Canyon Ranch Healthy Feet at SpaClub, in Las Vegas. “You’d never neglect worn tires.”

The trusty pair you wear almost every day can take only 400 to 600 miles of use (about seven months’ worth) before they need to be replaced. To see if yours are spent, do a tabletop test, says Jacqueline Sutera, a podiatrist in New York City. Put them on a flat surface, heels facing you. Squat down for an eye-level view: If they look slanted, it’s time for some new kicks.

Sizes will vary from brand to brand, so try shoes on in a store before you buy. While you’re there, have your feet measured. (Foot size can change with weight shifts and pregnancy.) Avoid pointy styles and heels higher than two inches, and be sure there’s a thumb’s-width space between your longest toe and the front of each shoe.

Add some cushioning. By the time you’re 50, you’ve logged at least 75,000 miles, and the layer of fat that lines your soles and cushions each step has begun to thin. “That loss of padding means you’re effectively walking on skin and bones,” says Suzanne Levine, a podiatrist and founder of Institute Beauté Podiatry Clinic & Medical Spa, in New York City. To soften the blow, slip over-the-counter cushioning inserts (not to be confused with corrective insoles) into your shoes.

Know your arches. If you have a very high or very low arch, you’re more vulnerable to certain ailments. To determine what kind you have, get your feet wet and step onto a paper towel.

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If the entire outline of each appears, you have low arches and are more prone to bunions, shin splints, and lower-back, hip, and knee pain. To prevent problems, wear shoes with arch support. If only the balls and heels make an impression, you have high arches, which raise risks for calluses and sprains. Protect yourself with high-topped shoes and extra cushioning, and avoid skinny heels.

Regardless of arch, most people can benefit from inserts, or in some cases custom orthotics, for extra stability and comfort. "These corrective cushions are the podiatric equivalent of prescription lenses," Manuel says.

Balance sitting and standing.

Stuck at your desk all day, your feet can get deprived of exercise and good circulation, which can make them swell up and feel tight in your shoes. To avoid this, get up and walk around the office every hour or so. By contrast, if your job requires you to stand for extended periods, sit every so often. "Unlike walking, continuously standing stresses the same spots on your feet," says Georgetanne Botek, a podiatrist

on staff in the department of orthopedic surgery at the Cleveland Clinic.

Ditch five pounds. Here's some motivation: With every step, that one foot is supporting your entire body weight. Every extra pound adds that much more pressure. "Your feet are your foundation," says David Levine. "Making the house lighter helps them last longer."

Nourish your soles. Treat the skin on your feet like that on your face, says Suzanne Levine. Besides cleansing, exfoliate weekly, and moisturize at the first sign of dryness to ward off calluses and cracking, which can lead to infection. For an intense treatment before bedtime, slather on a glycolic-acid cream, such as **Head to Toe Beauty Glycolic Foot 20%** (\$55, *pillowsfor yourfeet.com*), and cover your feet in plastic wrap for 20 minutes. Then soak them in warm water for 10 minutes and pumice away dead skin. Finish with a generous coat of ointment, such as **Aquaphor** (\$9, *cvs.com*), and wear a pair of socks to sleep. Come morning, you'll be refreshed and, once again, ready to hit the road.

ALL ABOUT EASE

These goods work as hard as your feet to heal whatever ails them.



RELIEVE SWELLING

Settle into warm water mixed with the rosemary and lemongrass found in **Earth Therapeutics Tea Tree Oil foot soak** to quiet your dogs. \$8, *earththerapeutics.com*.



SMOOTH ROUGHNESS

If you can practically walk barefoot on gravel, it's time for **Baby Foot**, a peel with 17 natural extracts that helps shed dry skin and soften calluses. \$25, *babyfoot.com*.



FIGHT FATIGUE

Revive your feet after a long day with **The Body Shop Peppermint Cooling foot spray**, which contains invigorating peppermint oil. \$10, *thebodyshop.com*.

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