Footwear advice

Background to footwear

- The basic function is to protect your feet from hard or rough surfaces.
- Well-fitting shoes are an essential part of the treatment of foot problems and one of the most important influences in the maintenance of good foot health.
- Unsuitable footwear can also adversely affect your back and knees.
- Incorrect-fitting or unsuitable shoes are the main cause of a foot problem, especially when appearance is considered to be more important to the wearer than providing a suitable environment for the feet.
- A 'break-in period' should never be required, certain footwear like Dr Martin boots or stiff material like work boots can take time to soften and does place the feet at risk of trauma and blistering / infection.

Basics of good shoe fit

- **Length** – there should be ½ inch / 1 cm between the end of your longest toe and the inside of your shoe. If the shoe is too short the toes will be cramped.
- **Width** – your foot should not feel constricted or bulge out over the sides of the soles. Try comparing the sole of your shoe against the sole of your foot. The toe box should be rounded and foot shaped, not pointed.
- **Heel** – ideally the heel should be no higher than 4cm and with a wide base. Any higher will exaggerate many foot problems, especially cramping of the toes. Posture is dramatically altered when walking on a high heel and may lead to back / hip / knee pain. The shoe should also have a firm heel cup to help support the ankle. If a shoe slips at the heel, then it is not a good fit.
- Consider a wedged heel for better weight distribution throughout the foot.
- Consider that regular flat shoes have different heel heights ranging from zero to 10mm. A regular or traditional heel on a flat shoe / trainer will be around 8mm. This can help reduce forefoot pain and arthritic pain throughout the major joints of the ankle and midfoot.

- **A secure, adjustable, fastening** – this is very important for holding the foot firmly within the shoe, it will stop the heel lifting out of the shoe and the foot sliding forwards in the shoe. A low fronted shoe results in increased clawing of the toes.

- Sole – try to find a shoe with a cushioned sole to help with shock absorption but remember that the sole should not be so flexible that the shoe can be bent in half.

- Shoe upper – should be leather that can breatheand adjust to the shape of your foot. Avoid uppers with seams and ridges.

- Condition – regularly check shoes to see if the inner lining has become torn or if the insole has any ridges. Such problems can cause blisters / callus / corns. Never wear wet shoes as these too can cause foot problems. Regularly check the soles to ensure that they are not worn out or that they do not have a stone or similar stuck in them.

Tips for finding a well-fitting shoe

- Take a cut out of your foot with you. If it crumples when placed in the shoe, the shoe is too small.

- Feet can change size depending on the time of day. Try to buy shoes in the afternoon when your feet may be more swollen.

- Check the inside of the shoes for seams / edges that may irritate. Put your hand inside and feel inside of the top of the shoe which should be smooth.

- Ask the shop assistant to check the fit.

- Walk around the shop wearing the new shoes as feet elongate when bearing weight.

- The style of the shoe will dictate its fit – a court shoe will always be smaller.

- If you use insoles (orthotics) take these with you and try the shoes on with them inside.

- If you have foot / toe deformities, you may need to try a specialist manufacturer.

- Make sure the shoes are suitable for the intended task. You may need to wear different shoes at different times of the day.

A summary of common foot complaints and their causes

Foot complaints	Causes
Hammer toes / mallet toes / claw toes	• Tight, constricting, shallow toe-box, too narrow, too short or both
Corns and calluses on the ends/tips of toes or between the toes	• As above • Also too shallow, too high a heel, slip-on or court shoes
Bunions which are rubbing on the shoe	• Narrow or pointed shoes • Not rounded or deep enough toe box • Synthetic upper rather than leather
Blisters on the foot	• Movement of the foot within the shoe especially when the heel cup is not firm enough or is a poor fit
Calluses on the ball of the foot	• High heels throwing body weight forward onto ball of the foot • Loss of padding under foot joints due to clawing of the toes • Non-cushioned sole • Being overweight
Heel callus	• Slippage of the heel out of the back of the shoe • Over-drying of the skin whilst wearing backless shoes • Being overweight
Nerve inflammation (usually between the joints in the ball of the foot)	• Shoes too tight causing sideways constriction of the foot joints
Flat feet causing pain in the arch of the foot	• Abnormal foot mechanics • Aggravated by lack of support round the mid foot
Athlete's foot / fungal infections	• Synthetic, non-breathable materials, shoes that have not been allowed to dry out (24 hours needed)
Dermatitis	• Allergy to materials or their treatments/dyes