

DO ARCHES REALLY FALL?

As any late-night channel surfer or frequent watcher of cable's *American Movie Classics* knows, the nagging pain of fallen arches or flat feet often was parodied by old beat cops who sat down after a long day, took off their shoes and griped while rubbing their aching feet. In many films, street tuffs and wise guys often referred to a passing cop as "flatfoot." Were fallen arches a myth exaggerated by Hollywood in the mid 20th Century? Or is it a legitimate health concern that deserves more attention today to help older Americans stay active?

The term fallen arches or flatfoot refers to a clinical condition in which the arch really does collapse and the foot flattens. It occurs from inflammation of the tendon that supports the arch and eventually causes it to lengthen or stretch. Those at greatest risk are older men and women who have been active most of their lives, primarily in occupations that require standing or walking most of the time. Adult-acquired flatfoot is a common overuse condition that can lead to severe foot pain and degenerative arthritis if left untreated.

The first symptom usually is pain from tendonitis. Early-stage cases can be treated with anti-inflammatory drugs and arch supports. If the condition worsens, bracing or surgery might be required. The goal of treatment is to stop progression of the condition and prevent or delay the onset of arthritis and most of the time this can be accomplished conservatively. Ask your foot and ankle specialist about specialized bracing and foot inserts for painful flat feet.