

## **Fix Feet First for Weight Loss Success**

Many of the estimated 70 million obese Americans are trapped in a life-threatening vicious cycle: Obesity aggravates foot problems, like heel pain and flat feet; sore feet make it hard to exercise and lose weight; and without exercise, obesity worsens and exacerbates progression of diabetes, heart disease and other serious health threats. Most fitness experts and foot and ankle experts are urging obese adults to seek immediate treatment for chronic, activity-limiting foot and ankle problems to foster compliance with physician-directed exercise programs.

Unfortunately, obese adults get caught up in the vicious cycle of avoiding physical activity due to foot or ankle pain, thereby permitting cardiovascular disease and other life-threatening conditions to worsen as a result. For example, in many cases, chronic heel pain occurs from carrying too much weight. Left untreated, it becomes an impediment to physical activity and meaningful weight loss.

There is no reason foot or ankle pain should stop obese patients from exercising, and the first step toward breaking that vicious cycle is to have the problem evaluated by a foot and ankle specialist.

According to a recent study, many causes of foot pain can be relieved non-surgically through stretching exercises, orthotics and athletic shoes with good shock absorption and support. If a bunion, heel pain or other condition requires surgery, patients can participate during their recovery in non-weight-bearing activities, such as riding a stationary bike, swimming or weight training.

For those moderately to severely overweight, a thorough physical examination is mandatory before beginning an exercise program. Once cleared by your physician to begin exercising, don't try to do too much too soon. Follow a gradual routine until your body adjusts to the stress of regular physical activity. For example, overweight patients should try to avoid working out on treadmills to minimize pounding and stress on their joints.

Shedding excess pounds helps diabetic patients control their disease, but many who experience foot ulcerations and vascular problems caused by diabetes might think they shouldn't exercise. This is not true.

Every diabetic patient needs regular foot exams to check for possible sore spots and assess nerve sensation before they start an exercise regimen. With proper diabetic foot care and the right footwear, most patients can follow an exercise regimen that is safe and appropriate for them. Ask your foot specialist about what kind of shoes are best for your exercise program and don't let your feet keep you from staying healthy.

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