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ISSUE 314 • JULY 2022

massagemag.com

All About Feet

Maintain Your Foundation

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Foot Care

What You Need to Know to Maintain Your Foundation

By Aiyana Fraley, LMT

MASSAGE is one of many careers in which standing is part of the job. Sitting is not an option for most massage therapists and may cause other postural issues in itself. So, how do we counter the negative effects of prolonged standing on our feet and overall health? **MASSAGE** Magazine spoke with foot specialists to find out what you can do to mitigate the effects of standing.

While proper body mechanics can prevent injury and back pain and provide longevity in a physically demanding career, good physical health starts with the feet. Long hours standing can have a deleterious impact on the feet—which can, in turn, lead to a list of ailments throughout the body.

The foundation of good posture, balance and health is at our feet. Each foot is made up of 26 bones, 33 joints and

many ligaments, tendons and muscles that balance the weight of our body. Prolonged hours standing without proper support can lead to foot pain, back pain, poor posture and even affect circulation and cardiovascular health.

Simply put, the feet are a significant part of our overall well-being and one that massage therapists should pay more attention to.

Standing's Ill Effects

“The feet are one of the most commonly injured body parts, and they can be very susceptible to overuse injuries,” said Steve Hruby, DC, of Kaizen Progressive Health in Scottsdale, Arizona. “After years of standing on your feet, you may start to experience pain in your feet, ankles, and knees. You may also notice that your feet feel numb or tingly. These are all signs that

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your feet are not getting the support they need.”

Research has found people who stand for long hours are more susceptible to lower back pain and discomfort, as a result of pelvic stabilizing muscles such as the *gluteus medius* being active for long periods of time in a standing position.

“[Standing] can also cause tightness in the Achilles tendon that feels like burning or stabbing pain in the heels,” said Demetris Elia, DC, of PEAKiropractic in Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas.

Other adverse effects of prolonged standing include reduced blood supply to leg muscles, which can cause fatigue and pain in the legs, back and neck. Poor blood circulation in the legs can also lead to varicose veins. Studies also show swelling, dizziness, heart rate and blood pressure changes associated with prolonged standing without dynamic movement.

Prolonged standing can affect the efficiency of the veins in the legs and feet and lead to chronic health issues. Faisal Siddiqi, MD, FACC, RPhS, the medical director of Vein Specialist Centers in New Jersey, explains that the more you stand, the less blood moves in the veins just beneath your skin.

“The veins subsequently dilate and perform less efficiently,” Siddiqi said. “With chronic wear and tear, the veins can no longer return to their normal size and the pressure builds inside the veins, causing blood to pool in the legs.”

People can subsequently suffer from heaviness, leg fatigue, foot pain, restless leg, and ankle swelling, he added. Spider and varicose veins commonly result in the legs and feet due to venous insufficiency. With venous insufficiency, the ankles

REGULAR FOOT-CARE TIPS

Our team of foot-care experts recommend that massage therapists:

- Use compression stockings.
- Schedule work breaks.
- Elevate your legs.
- Use a padded mat in your work area.
- Get regular massage and chiropractic treatments to help your feet maintain their arches and to correct muscle imbalances that cause discomfort.
- Stretch your feet and legs throughout your workday.
- Use a massage tool, such as a spiked rubber ball, to relieve pain or tension.
- Do simple movements to engage your calf muscles, because this will help pump blood effectively from your legs back to your heart.

and feet are prone to developing visible vessels on the skin, also known as *corona phlebectatica*.

“With work that requires prolonged standing, preventing venous insufficiency is key,” said Siddiqi.

Performing massage while barefoot can also impact your feet negatively. Grounding and earthing while massaging are common practices for some massage therapists, and many therapists prefer to work barefoot for those practices or just

because it feels good. “There’s a lot of research that shows that grounding, being barefoot in nature, helps release negative energy and improve your mindset,” said Elia. However, working barefoot for long periods of time on an unforgiving, hard floor can have some detrimental effects on the feet.

“Standing barefoot for long hours can lead to a number of problems, including Achilles tendonitis, bunions, calluses and corns, flat feet, hammertoes and heel spurs, back pain and stiffness,” said Hruby. “However, there are some benefits to standing barefoot, such as improved balance and posture, and increased circulation.”

When choosing to work barefoot, consider the type of floor. Is it tile, hardwood or carpet? These will each have a different impact on your feet. (No matter the type of floor, you can add a padded mat to alleviate pressure on your feet and body.) Our experts agree that for standing and working for hours in a day, the support of shoes and inserts is important.

The Role of Shoes & Inserts

Choosing high-quality footwear that is supportive of your type of foot is a necessary first step, our experts said.

“If the feet are not properly aligned, then the rest of the body doesn’t have a good basis for support and it throws off all biomechanics of the body,” said Elia. “One of the best things to do is to wear the correct shoes for your feet. Some people are pronators, some are supinators, and some have a neutral foot,” and there are shoes and inserts for all those types, he said. Elia said he wears Asics, which have options for neutral feet, pronators, and supinators.

Good shoes are important for providing support and improving balance and posture while on the job, which can reduce pain and injuries, said Hruby.

Find the right shoes that offer the necessary support. They can be sneakers or orthopedic shoes, or you can purchase custom orthotics to place in your shoes for an additional layer of comfort and support.

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Some footwear stores' workers are trained to measure your foot's length, width, volume and arch. Other stores have a computerized foot screening method that shows you where most of your weight on your foot is being applied while walking, standing or running.

"An easy way to figure out what you need is by looking at the sole of an old pair of shoes," said Elia. "If the outside of the sole is more beaten up than the inside, you're probably a supinator—typically bigger-framed people. If the inside of the sole is more beaten up, then you are a pronator."

Foot-Care is Necessary

How important is the care of our feet for career longevity and quality of life for massage therapists? Very.

"In a career where standing on your feet is a must, I would say [foot care is] vital," said Elia. "Feet are our contact with Earth and support the rest of the body. If the feet are in pain, the ankles get tight, and there is a cascade of symptoms that can lead to lower back pain and even shoulder pain."

Massage therapists help people live a better life, and that should start with taking care of themselves, added Elia. "A

weekly routine could be the foot bath or using a spike ball or an acupressure mat on a daily basis." These will help stimulate the feet, increase circulation, decrease swelling, and reduce pain.

In short, if you're a massage therapist you should spoil your feet. Get plenty of foot massages, rest your feet at the end of the day, soak them in a warm foot bath with Epsom salts, elevate them, apply tension-relief ointments or oils, create a foot care routine that helps you relax—and invest in a great pair of shoes or orthotics. **M**

Aiyana Fraley, LMT, is a freelance writer and health care professional with more than 18 years of experience in the massage field. She teaches yoga and offers sessions in massage, Reiki, sound healing and essential oils. Her articles for *MASSAGE Magazine* include "Yoga Nidra for Self-Care" and "Yomassage: Massage + Yoga = a New Revenue Stream for MTs" (both, massagemag.com).

 Read "Hot & Cold Therapy to Soothe the MT's Feet," by Angela Reiter, on massagemag.com.



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