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Help for asbestos exposure

Christopher Guinn, an attorney with the Simmons law firm, talked to the May meeting of the St. Louis Building and Construction Trades Council about mesothelioma, a deadly lung cancer caused by asbestos exposure that has afflicted millions of workers throughout the country. Some wives and children have even been exposed to asbestos through exposure to their husband or father's clothing, he said. He encouraged building trades workers whose families might suspect the disease to discuss it with the Simmons firm, a national leader in helping workers recover compensation and proper medical care. The firm has a booklet with questions and answers about the disease. The booklet and other information can be obtained at 1-877-859-6576, or by calling Guinn at 618-259-6246.

Labor Tribune photo

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Be on your toes when taking care of your feet

By KEVIN WEAKS

My pal Bobby is an outdoors guy. In fact, he's the editor of *Outdoor Guide*, a terrific newspaper which is published by the parent company of the Labor Tribune. I'm not an outdoors guy like Bobby. My idea of camping out is sleeping on the couch. One thing we have in common is that we both wear cowboy boots, the kind with a raked heel and pointy toes.

Speaking of toes, ever take a close look at yours? The reason you might want to do it is to make sure that the style of shoes – or cowboy boots – you wear matches your toes. If you buy some pointy toed cowboy boots, for example, make sure that your toes are also aligned in a rather “pointy” fashion.

In general, most people seem to find “boxy” shoe styles to be more comfortable if only because most people, like my wife, tend to have “boxy” feet. Getting footwear that is too narrow is a guaranteed recipe for some considerable foot pain. About 75% of people in the United States have foot pain at some time in their lives, and most of it is caused by shoes that don't fit properly or that force the feet into unnatural shapes (such as pointed-toe, high-heeled shoes). Being a slave to fashion has its consequences.

KNOW YOUR FEET

The foot is a complex structure of 26 bones and 33 joints, layered with an intertwining web of more than 120 muscles, ligaments, and nerves. Because the feet are small compared with the rest of the body, the impact of each step exerts tremendous force upon them. This force is about 50 percent greater than a person's body weight. During a typical day, people spend about four hours on their feet and take 8,000 to 10,000 steps. This means that your feet support a combined force equivalent to several hundred tons every day.

Years of wear and tear can take a toll. So can disease, poor circulation, improperly trimmed toenails and, yes, wearing shoes that don't fit properly. In addition to allowing you to run away from people who want to do you harm, your feet can save your life because problems with your feet can be the first sign of more serious medical conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, and nerve and circulatory disorders.

PREVENTING FOOT TROUBLE

Here are some tips from Group Health Plan, which provides comprehensive health care coverage to employers and union groups in Missouri and Illinois:

Check your feet regularly. That means doing more than just looking down and making sure you have all 10 toes. If you haven't seen your feet in awhile, you might need to lose that gut. Either way, ask a member of your

family check them. Podiatrists and primary care doctors (internists and family practitioners) are qualified to treat most foot problems. Sometimes the special skills of an orthopedic surgeon or dermatologist are needed.

Keep that blood circulating. Do this by putting your feet up when you are sitting or lying down, stretching if you've had to sit for a long while, walking, having a gentle foot massage, or taking a warm foot bath (guys!?). Try to avoid pressure from shoes that don't fit right. Try not to expose your feet to cold temperatures. Don't sit for long periods of time (especially with your legs crossed). One more thing: Don't smoke. Trust me. It's bad for your lungs and because it affects circulation it doesn't do your feet any good either.



WEAKS

BUY THE RIGHT SHOES

The size of your feet changes as you grow older so always have your feet measured before buying shoes. I didn't know this, but I did know that the best time to measure your feet is at the end of the day when your feet are largest.

- Most of us have one foot that is larger than the other, so fit your shoe to your larger foot. Mine is the left foot. What's yours?
- Don't select shoes by the size marked inside the shoe but by how the shoe fits your foot.
- Select a shoe that is shaped like your foot. Got square feet?
- During the fitting process, make sure there is enough space (3/8" to 1/2") for your longest toe at the end of each shoe when you are standing up.
- Make sure the ball of your foot fits comfortably into the widest part of the shoe.
- Don't buy shoes that feel too tight and expect them to stretch to fit. That also goes for hand-me-downs.

Walk in the shoes to make sure they fit and feel right. Here's a little tip: When you get home and spend some time walking on carpet to make sure the fit is a good one. That way the soles won't be marked up and you can return them. Oh, and keep the receipt.

One last piece of advice.

Whether you buy shoes or cowboy boots, remember the words of Will Rogers: “Don't squat with your spurs on.”

Contact Kevin Weaks at kweaksl@labor-tribune.com.



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