

TOOLBOX TALK #21

PREVENT FOOT PAIN AND INJURIES

Job-related foot pain and injuries can vary from mild, such as a blister caused by a work boot, to severe, such as the amputation of toes after a crushing injury. According to the Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS), foot injuries fall into two categories: injuries resulting from punctures, crushing incidents, sprains and lacerations; and injuries resulting from slips, trips and falls. (Although slips, trips and falls don't necessarily result in a foot injury, lack of foot safety awareness often plays a role in their occurrence.)



Work that requires all-day standing can be tiring, and injuries can result. “Continuous standing can cause the joints of bones of the feet to become misaligned (i.e. flat feet) and can cause inflammation that can lead later to rheumatism and arthritis,” CCOHS states.

Causes

A number of factors can contribute to foot pain and injuries at work. Two of the most common are flooring and footwear.

- **Flooring:** Concrete is unyielding and uncomfortable to stand on for long stretches of time. CCOHS recommends using wood, cork, carpeting or rubber – any material that provides some level of flexibility. In addition, anti-fatigue matting can help provide cushioning to reduce foot fatigue, but there's one caveat: If not installed properly, floor mats can result in slip-and-trip incidents. If your workplace is prone to slippery areas, consider installing special anti-slip flooring or mats.
- **Footwear:** Protective footwear is designed to minimize exposure to specific occupational hazards, not eliminate them, CCOHS states. Therefore, protective footwear can't guarantee total worker protection. That said, when buying footwear for workers:
 - Ensure both feet of a worker are measured beforehand, as feet generally differ in size. Buy the size that fits the bigger foot.
 - Don't assume that too-tight footwear will stretch out.
 - Have workers try on shoes at the end of the work shift, when feet are likely to be the most swollen.
 - Consider purchasing shock-absorbing insoles for workers if their jobs require them to stand or walk on hard flooring.
 - Consult a podiatrist if a worker can't find properly fitting shoes.
 - When trying on shoes, advise workers not to wear tight socks, as doing so can lead to toe cramping.