

Are your Feet Fat? **Dr. Tom Coniglione, MD**

Are your feet fat? Well, the question should be: Do you have fat in your feet? If we do, why do we have fat in our feet? Why do all feet need fat? Read on.

A seasoned runner went on a vacation to the Grand Canyon. In the canyon area he hiked, walked and walked more. For this trip he brought his running shoes but it was too hot to run. Instead, he took most of the week off running and just walked. To walk, he wore sandals. The sandals were made of recycled automobile tires.

On returning from the Canyon, one heel hurt. It hurt when he got out of bed in the morning before walking or running. Actually, his heel hurt most of the time. He stopped wearing sandals and wore only dress shoes and running shoes when he could. After two weeks of frustrating heel pain, he asked for help.

Visualize, if you will, the foot. There is skin covering some fat. Then there is the heel bone to which the plantar fascia attaches.

Yes, we all need fat in our feet. The fat serves useful role. It is a cushion. Fat cushions the heel structures from the impact imposed by hard surfaces. Although fat is important, sometimes, we do not have as much fat as we need. Many runners do not have much fat anyway. The typical runner's fat content is usually low. Look at a runner's face. It is often "bony." A bony face results from a lack of fat in the face.

So it goes with the heel. With a loss of fat in the heel, the cushioning action of the fat is lost. Another factor to consider is that as we age, the heel fat loses its firmness. The result is that walking on a really hard surface can "bruise" the heel.

At times, this same pain can be due to plantar fasciitis. We see plantar fasciitis in people who are "up on their toes," such as sprinter, hikers, and jumpers. The fact our runner walked and hiked through the Canyon also means his heel pain could have been old fashioned plantar fasciitis. Neither a heel bruise from trauma or plantar fasciitis is a favorable diagnosis.

As this article is written, we still are not certain exactly what is causing this runner's heel pain. He seems to be responding to cushioning his heel, but he still could have plantar fasciitis.

Because rigid orthotics create the same unforgiving environment as walking in sandals made of automobile tires, we do not make orthotics from rigid material.

Thus far, we have started with the simplest approach we can take. We have cushioned his heel with various pads.

There are other parts of the foot that need fat for cushioning. For example, under the front of the foot there are the metatarsal bones. Between these bones and the skin there is fat for

cushioning. When these bones are traumatized there is (metatarsalgia) pain in the ball of the foot. Cushioning the metatarsal bones is quite simple – ask the runners who now wear these pads.

All feet need fat. At times, we do not have enough fat in our feet. Fat cushions various parts of the foot. When the foot fat is deficient or ineffective, we have very effecting and simple “fixes.”