

for special occasions, lace ups are best for when you're very active, while flat slippers that cover the whole of your feet are good for cold winter nights. It's also important to keep your shoes in good repair - soles that are rubbed thin, or a worn down heel, can be dangerous.

Pamper your feet with comfortable and safe shoes and they'll support you for years.

For more information about falls prevention, contact your local Community Health Centre.

What to do when you need an interpreter

If you feel you can't communicate well in English with a health professional at places such as a public hospital or community health centre, the Health Care Interpreter Service can send an interpreter to help you. Contact them by phoning the Service closest to where you live, or ask the hospital or community health centre to contact the service for you. The telephone numbers are: Central, Eastern and Southern Sydney Areas (02) 515 3222; Northern Area (02) 9926 7560, South Western Sydney (02) 757 1800; Western Sydney and Wentworth areas (02) 840 3456; Hunter Area (049) 246 285 (after hours (049) 61 5353; Illawarra (042) 74 4211; Griffith (069) 62 3900.

For an interpreter to help you talk to a private doctor, call the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450 for access to an interpreter by phone. TIS also provides telephone interpreting for any situation where people need help to communicate in English.

Telephone numbers are correct at time of publication but are not continually updated. You may need to check the numbers in the telephone directory.

Stay On Your Feet With Safer Shoes

REVIEWED
September 2004
NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service

NSW HEALTH
DEPARTMENT

Stay on your Feet with Safer Shoes

Considering how hard they work, most of us don't treat our feet very kindly. We ignore them, squeeze them into badly-fitting shoes and never give them a second thought until they start to hurt. In an average lifetime, a pair of feet will walk around 120,000 kms, so it's no surprise that around 40 per cent of us will have some form of foot problems at some time in their life. Most of these problems could be avoided by wearing the right kind of shoes.

Badly fitting shoes are also a common cause of falls. Many people slip, trip or stumble because of a slippery sole or a heel that's too high. Wearing safe, supportive shoes is a good way of keeping feet healthy and of preventing falls. This is good advice for us all - but especially for older people. Falls can cause serious injury at any age, but the older you are, the harder it is to recover. A fall is the most common injury that results in people over the age of 60 being admitted to hospital. Thirty per cent of these admissions are for a fracture of the hip.

Whatever your age, here are some tips on choosing safer shoes.

- Shoes need to fit well - even if you're only wearing them around the house. Fifty per cent of falls happen at home. Wearing poor fitting slippers or shoes can make you shuffle and upset your balance. You can tell if a shoe fits properly if there's enough room for the toes (at least 1.2cm) between the longest toe and the front of the shoe)

and a snug grip at the heel.

- A sole that grips the surface you walk on gives security - especially if the surface is shiny or wet. A rubber or synthetic material with a raised pattern gives a non-slip surface. Leather soles are generally too slippery, but a shoe repairer can give them more grip by attaching a rubber half sole to them (or you can do it yourself by buying a special kit from hardware stores).
- The safest heels are low (less than 5cm)) and broad - this gives good contact with the ground. Wedge heels are a good option if they're less than 5cm.
- A shoe that covers the foot well such as a lace up or high cut court shoe will give good support. But slip-on shoes, thongs and scuffs can make your feet tired and can easily cause you to turn your ankle. If the back of the shoe is firm it will give your ankle good support.
- A cushioned, flexible shoe (as in running shoes) protects the feet from hard and uneven surfaces and acts as a shock absorber. Look for something similar for the shoes you wear most.
- Lightweight shoes made of a soft material that "breathes", such as leather or a synthetic material with holes in it to allow the air in will be more comfortable.

It's best to choose the right shoe to suit the activity you're doing. Low heeled court shoes with a non-slip sole are good for special occasions, lace ups are best for when you're very active, while