

Health Tip Of The Week

Skip The Flip-Flops

By Susan Yara, Reprinted from May 4, 2006

This summer, give your feet some comfort: Get out of those flip-flops.

Yes, you heard correctly—those rubber soles aren't doing your dogs any good.

While spike-heeled stilettos and strappy sandals seem like the obvious culprits when it comes to foot pain, doctors say the worst shoes a person can wear are those flat thongs. And though many people believe wearing them is a way to give their feet a break, in fact, it's quite the opposite. The shoes are a major cause of foot problems because they offer little, if any, support.

"Flip-flops have a spongy sole, so when the foot hits the ground, it rolls inward and the sponge allows it to roll even more than usual," says **Dr. John E. Mancuso**, a podiatrist at the Manhattan Podiatry Associates in New York. "This is called pronation, and it causes many problems in the foot."

Our feet take a lot of abuse: They bear our full body weight, help us keep

our balance and enable us to get from point A to point B. Sadly, we show our appreciation by shoving them into tight shoes and stinking sneakers. It's a good thing they're meant to take the beating: Each time a foot pounds the ground, the arch is supposed to be locked to absorb shock. But during pronation, the arch opens and releases this locking mechanism, leading to problems such as pain in the heel, the arch, the toes and in the forefoot. Even worse, flip-flops force a person to overuse the tendons in the foot, which can cause tendonitis.

"Flip-flops don't really hold on the foot like most shoes do, so we use the tendons and muscles to hold them on," says **Dr. Greg Cohen**, a podiatrist at Long Island College Hospital in Brooklyn, N.Y.

During the summer, Cohen also tends to see a lot of ankle sprains—another result of flip-flop use. "When a person steps off the stairs or a curb wrong, there's nothing there to hold or support

the foot or ankle."

Of course, not all foot crises arise from flip-flops (which, by the way, can still be worn to the pool or beach, as long as it isn't for the whole day). During the summer, people are at greater risk of getting athlete's foot, warts and blisters—problems that are exacerbated by heat, moisture and friction.

The best way to treat these issues is to stop them before they even happen, starting simply with a pedicure. It's a good way to get your feet clean and in shape. **Mancuso** says if a person has real problems such as thick, dead skin or cuticles, then it might be better to see a podiatrist; otherwise, a pedicurist can handle it. Also, look for signs of cracking heels, something easily solved with a pumice stone and cream used on the feet every night. "This should be daily maintenance for a woman," he says, though the issue is more aesthetic than health-related. "There's nothing worse than a dry, cracked heel in a sling-back."