



Zoe Birch is a Chartered Physiotherapist and founder of PhysioMotion, which operate four London clinics as well as providing physiotherapy at home. Here Zoe asks a simple question:

## WHY ARE FEET SO IMPORTANT?

problems such as back, hip, ankle and knee pain. These can occur due to:

- Change in gait pattern
- Reduced control when landing with impact such as jumping or running
- Stiffness in the whole foot or parts resulting in compensatory movements to bypass the immobile area
- Ill-fitted shoes

**So how can we avoid these problems and keep our feet healthy?**

Your feet are great at telling you when something is not quite right, it could be a pain in a particular area or increased hard skin in another. At this point it is a great time to get advice before more permanent changes happen or pain appears further up the leg.



Soleus wall heel raise exercise.

If you are experiencing pain in the feet, this is where it would be beneficial to see a physiotherapist or podiatrist to provide you with an in-depth assessment of your foot mobility, strength and stability in static and dynamic movements, and gait analysis. This would be assessed in relation to how the rest of your body is performing these tasks as well.

This is helpful for you to understand what the cause of the pain is and help you make the best treatment plan to alleviate the pain or be referred for further investigation with a foot and ankle consultant.

**Prevention is better than cure!**

With a lot of musculoskeletal problems caused by adaptive movement patterns or overloading soft tissue structure, these can be avoided with preventive exercises such as:

- Heel raises
- Resisted ankle and toe movements
- Toe spreading
- Arch shortening
- Balance exercises

See the photos on this page for some examples of these exercises. So get started working those foot muscles and don't neglect them in your exercise programme!

**W**hy are your feet so important? Could they be the underlying reason for a problem elsewhere in your body?

Your foot is made up of 26 bones, 30 ligaments and 29 muscles which provide structure, stability and movement to the rest of your body.

In "*Philosophy of the Foot*" by Taymour Soomro, the shoe maker describes the foot as the "*noblest part of the body. It is the body's beast of burden. It is the foot soldier for the body's army.*" This indicates how important they are to ensure the rest of our body can work normally.

**But what can happen when things are going wrong in your foot?**

Common conditions that can happen locally to your foot are:

- Plantar fasciitis - pain in the heel when initially walking
- Bunion/hallux valgus - increased bone around the base of the big toe
- Morton's neuroma - inflammation of a nerve between the webspace of your toes
- Acquired flat foot syndrome - injury to tibialis posterior (muscle that supports your arch) resulting in the arch of the foot flattening

Changes in your foot strength, mobility and control can also have adverse effects on the rest of your body causing



Resisted big toe flexion exercise.



Resisted ankle inversion exercise.

Simple things that you can do are to ensure that you keep your nails short and that skin is maintained clean and soft, especially between the toes, to reduce broken skin and fungus growing. If you find it difficult to perform this then it is worth finding a chiropodist in the local area or who can perform a home visits.

They are also great at letting you know when the biomechanics of your feet are changing and it would be beneficial to see a physiotherapist or podiatrist to assess these further and provide you with corrective exercises and/or orthotic devices such as an insole. A lot of foot conditions can be corrected before they become permanent and require surgical intervention if treated early.

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