



Treating foot pain without surgery

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HEALING WITHOUT SURGERY

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Gloria Campos reports / WFAA-TV

DALLAS - While the women's dress shoe industry is a \$15 billion annual business, another \$5 billion is spent each year trying to find relief for aching feet.

But there is some good news: Most foot pain can be treated without surgery. "This is public enemy number one," said Dr. Kelly Walker while eyeing a high-heeled sandal in a catalog. "They are beautiful and I would like to be able to wear them every day, but I can't either."

Walker, a podiatrist, said she knows about foot pain first hand since she suffers from plantar fasciitis. "It's an inflammatory injury from non-supportive shoe walking," she said. "It's a repetitive injury to the foot throughout the day."

Eighty percent of Walker's patients come in with common foot pain. Both Terry Traveland and her mother, Mary, have chronic foot woes. "When your feet hurt, all of you hurts," said Mary. But most don't have to endure the pain since plantar fasciitis can usually be healed without surgery.

"What we like to do is get someone into support first thing in the morning before they walk barefoot," Walker said. "That is the worst thing you can do for plantar fasciitis." Patients with plantar fasciitis should slip into a sturdy shoe with a firm arch every morning for good support so that they don't reinjure the fascia, Walker said.

Arch supports are the number one seller at Foot Solutions, which specializes in selling shoes and accessories to help reduce foot pain. Seventy percent of their customers are women. "It has to do with wearing the proper kinds of shoe and wearing the right kind of support in that shoe," said Diane Curry, with Foot Solutions.

For the Travelands, relief came in the form of a sturdy, unusual shoe called a Z-Coil. "I went to the store to buy them, and I limped into the store and came back out walking pretty normally," Terry said. "Within two weeks, I didn't have any pain. And within four months, I was diagnosed as not having plantar fasciitis anymore."

Z-Coils cost about \$200 to \$250 a pair, which can cost about the same as a nice pair of heels. It's also cheaper than surgery. The Travelands wear Z-Coils to exercise. High heels are the main culprits behind the second-most common foot pain, an inflamed nerve called a neuroma.

Foot pain sufferers can ease the pain of neuroma and other foot ailments with anti-inflammatories, wearing a wide flexible shoe and wearing high heels only for a brief time. "I would say keep it to a minimum, maybe an hour or less," she said. Walker said don't wear flip flops all day either. If high heels are public enemy number one, flip flops are a close second.

A recent survey indicates 61 percent of American women spend \$50 or more on a pair of shoes. Treating foot pain doesn't have to cost much more than that; but left untreated, foot problems can lead to knee, hip and lower back pain.