

Weekend Warriors Need Proper Footwear to Combat Sports Injuries

Each year more than 1.2 million¹ Canadians are sidelined from their favourite sports activity due to a sports-related injury that could have been prevented through proper fitting footwear and shoe selection, according to the Pedorthic Association of Canada.

“Too many athletes forget that their footwear is a key piece of their sports equipment. Whether the person is a recreational athlete or a professional one, if the footwear is inappropriate for the sport or the person’s foot type then they are putting themselves at risk of injury to the soft tissue, bones or joints of the lower limb. Appropriate shoe selection and proper fitting footwear is vital to preventing many of today’s sports-related injuries,” said Jonathan Robinson, a Canadian Certified Pedorthist and president of the Pedorthic Association of Canada.

Canadian Certified Pedorthists are footcare specialists, who are experts in footwear, orthoses (also called orthotics) and orthopaedic modifications to footwear. They specialize in the assessment, design and fit of footwear and custom-fitted orthoses to help deal with pain, discomfort and disabilities of the feet and lower limbs.

According to Mr. Robinson the demographic at the highest risk for sports-related injuries is to those known as the ‘weekend warrior.’ “This is the athlete who plays basketball once a week or tennis on weekends. Typically these athletes are middle age, seeking exercise for social or health reasons, but who may not have time to train properly for their activity due to the demands of a full time job and/or family. Nor do they invest in the necessary activity-specific footwear and opt instead to have one pair of running shoes to serve for all sports activities, not realizing that this puts them at a greater risk for injury.”

The most common type of sports-related injuries are ‘overuse injuries’ such as *plantar fasciitis* and *Achilles tendinitis*. Overuse injuries are the result of repetitive strain or excessive use of muscles and joints causing fatigue, pain and discomfort. For example, a runner that does not warm up their muscles before running or wear properly fitted, activity-specific footwear that has features built in to support the feet and lower limbs during said activity is at a higher risk of a sports-related injury than someone who takes these precautions.

One of the most common types of overuse injuries **plantar fasciitis**, is an inflammatory condition affecting the heel area, that can typically be prevented through proper fitting footwear, a sound training schedule, over-the-counter devices or custom-fitted orthoses.

Symptoms of this type of overuse injury include pain at the central or middle of the heel, the pain is often at its worst in the morning and upon rising after periods of rest. It usually begins to feel better once the athlete takes a few steps and warms-up. Anyone participating in sports that require a lot of jumping and running, such as jogging, tennis, basketball, football and baseball are more susceptible to this type of overuse injury if they are not wearing proper fitting footwear that is activity-specific. Achilles tendinitis is an inflammation of the tendon located above the heel on the back of the leg. Symptoms include pain that develops gradually along with some swelling and/or stiffness in the back of the leg. Achilles tendinitis is usually the most painful when athletes use their strong calf muscles or go up on their toes. It too can typically be prevented through proper fitting footwear, stretching in conjunction with

over-the-counter devices or custom-fitted orthoses. Basketball, tennis and baseball players are more susceptible to this type of sports-related injury if they are not wearing activity-specific footwear or proper fitting shoes.

To prevent and alleviate any pain caused by sports-related injuries, The Pedorthic Association of Canada recommends:

- Consulting a local Canadian Certified Pedorthist for a biomechanical exam to ensure the right type of footwear for any sports-activity and to help guarantee proper fitting and correct support for foot type.
- Slowly and carefully increase activity while allowing the tissues of the lower limb time to properly adapt to the new activity levels
- When injury occurs and biomechanical faults are found, custom orthoses and appropriate footwear choices can help the healing process and stop the recurrence of problems
- Selecting a stable shoe with a sturdy heel counter (the back of a shoe that controls motion) and stable midsoles that still provide shock absorption are needed
- Over-the-counter devices often help prevent simple cases of over pronation and can assist with healing
- If a foot injury occurs, rest, use ice and seek help from your physician.
- If a condition persists it can help to visit complimentary health professionals, such as a physiotherapist or massage therapist, who specializes in sports medicine.
- Physiotherapists can also assist in providing detailed information on pre-event warmup and stretching that will also help prevent any sports-related injuries.

By following the above-mentioned recommendations, Canadians will be able to play it safe and better enjoy their favourite sports activities while decreasing the risk of sustaining a sports-related injury.

As one of the few healthcare professionals educated in the assessment, creation, modification and fit of footwear and custom-fitted orthoses, Canadian Certified Pedorthists work with prescribing healthcare physicians to help people of all ages achieve and maintain healthy lower limbs and feet. For more information, please visit the Pedorthic Association of Canada's website at www.pedorthic.ca.