



WHS - Suitable Footwear Communication

Footwear is essential to the protection of feet against health and safety hazards encountered everyday – not just at work.

Teaching and learning environments in departmental workplaces such as classrooms, kitchens, laboratories, workshops, playgrounds and sporting fields present a range of hazards that may not be encountered in the regular office environment.

While some tasks require protective footwear due to the inherent risks of the activity, all workers should consider the tasks they will undertake during the day and whether their footwear is appropriate. Consideration is to be given to the activities they will be doing during the day and where they will be performing those activities to ensure appropriate footwear is worn to protect the feet and minimise risk of injury.

Activities may include:

- Traversing uneven ground and loose surfaces (e.g. playground duty)
- Entering any workshops
- Supervising sport
- Manual tasks e.g. cleaning
- Carrying items up and down stairs.

Suitable Footwear at Work

Suitable footwear can improve your posture, eliminate discomfort and prevent injury.

Footwear must:

- Fit comfortably and according to the shape of your foot
- Provide adequate foot support, particularly in the arches
- Promote normal distribution of weight throughout the foot
- Protect the foot from injury (trauma, burns, chemicals)
- Provide a clean, dry and ventilated environment for the feet

General guidelines for choosing proper footwear:

- The shoe must have a low, wide-based heel and well-fitting heel cup
- The shoe must grip the heel firmly
- The shape and body of the shoe must be maintained – you should not feel like you are “walking out of your shoes”
- The sole should be non-slip and assist in shock absorption
- Use shock-absorbing insoles if your job requires prolonged walking or standing on hard floors
- The toe box must be wide enough to allow for freedom of toe movement
- The mid-shoe should enclose around the foot comfortably
- The shoe must have a fastening across the instep to prevent the foot from slipping when walking

Tips for buying shoes to wear at work:

- Buy shoes late in the afternoon when feet are likely to be swollen to their maximum size (wear appropriate socks)
- Have both feet measured and buy the shoes that fit the larger foot (feet normally differ in



- size)
- Walk in the shoes, making sure your foot is comfortable and adequately supported, the midsole of the shoe allows your foot to bend, the heel is stable and there is no internal contact stress
- Choose footwear based on usage, activity and for protection against environmental hazards
- Caution should be taken with a steel toe cap – the edge of the cap must not cut into the top of the foot
- Watch for wear and tear – replace shoes on a regular basis

What are some causes for foot problems?

Some foot problems are so common that they can occur in virtually any workplace and under any working conditions.

Foot Problems	Common Causes
Severely aching feet, blisters, calluses, corns, rheumatism, arthritis, malformations of toes, fallen arches (flat feet), bunions, sprains	Long periods of standing, hard flooring, and poorly fitted footwear: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high heels - pointed shoes - lack of arch support - too loose or too tight footwear
Sweaty feet, fungal infections (athlete's foot)	Hot and humid environment, strenuous work, footwear with synthetic (non- porous) uppers

There are no comprehensive statistics on these kinds of problems with feet. Surveys suggest that two out of every three workers suffer from some form of a foot problem.

Footwear that fits poorly or is in need of repair also contributes heavily to foot discomfort. Pointed toes and high heels are particularly inappropriate for working footwear.

What are some examples of workplace foot injuries?

Injuries	Common Causes
Crushed or broken feet, amputations of toes or feet	Feet trapped between objects or caught in a crack, falls of heavy objects, moving vehicles.
Punctures of the sole of the foot	Loose nails, sharp metal or glass objects
Cuts or severed feet or toes, lacerations	Chain saws, rotary mowers, unguarded machinery
Burns	Molten metal splashes, chemical splashes, contact with fire, flammable or explosive atmospheres
Electric shocks	Static electricity, contact with sources of electricity
Sprained or twisted ankles, fractured or broken bones because of slips, trips or falls	Slippery floors, littered walkways, incorrect footwear, poor lighting.