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**Weekend Doctor**

By Dr. Thomas F. Vail

“Oh, my aching feet!” is a phrase you often hear from pregnant women.

However, sore feet are not just a symptom for women during pregnancy.

Women often experience foot pain during pregnancy because of increased weight, foot instability and swelling.

In the last five years, I have seen an increase in pregnant women with foot pain because women are more active than ever before, even running marathons during their pregnancies.

I recommend the following guidelines to help reduce foot pain during pregnancy.

Pregnant women often experience throbbing, swollen feet due to excess fluid build up, or edema, in their feet from the weight and position of the baby.

To reduce swelling, put your feet up whenever possible, stretch your legs frequently, wear wide comfortable shoes, and avoid crossing your legs when sitting.

Pain in the arch can be due to arch fatigue or overpronation, also known as flattening of the arch.

Overpronation occurs due to extreme stress to the ligament that holds up the arch of the foot.

The best way to prevent arch pain is to stretch in the morning and before and after any exercise. Also, do not go barefoot and make sure to wear supportive, low-heeled shoes.

Foot cramps are caused by increased blood volume and high progesterone levels brought on by pregnancy.

To prevent cramps, increase circulation by rotating ankles and elevating feet while sitting.

If cramps persist, try a walk around the block and stretch your calf muscles every day.

Painful, ingrown toenails can be caused by excessive stress from tight-fitting shoes.

Give your feet a break by wearing wider shoes during the last trimester of pregnancy.

If you have an ingrown toenail, avoid attempting “bathroom surgery.”

Repeated cutting of the nail can cause the condition to worsen over time. It is best to seek treatment with a foot and ankle surgeon.

Believe it or not, it is common for women to experience a change in their foot size during pregnancy.

A permanent growth of up to half a size in women’s feet can occur from the release of a hormone called relaxin; the same hormone that allows the pelvis to open to deliver the baby.

Relaxin makes the ligaments in your feet more flexible, causing feet to spread wider and longer.

Pregnancy and pending motherhood should be a joy. If foot pain persists, a podiatrist can provide relief with conservative treatments like physical therapy, foot orthotics, supportive shoes and minor toenail procedures.



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