

After a couple of false alarms, winter seems to be well and truly on its way and with some of the COVID-19 restrictions changing, more people are starting to head back in to work or head out to do socially distanced shopping or checking up on relatives.

We would usually start seeing problems relating to changes in footwear and seasons normally but the recent restrictions and footwear changes that come with that are likely to amplify that, so here are a 3 things to consider in this time of transition.

1. Is it humid in here?

Whilst most of us complain about the cold, another part of winter is a drop in humidity. Less humidity means that our skin is likely to be more dehydrated leading to cracking, irritation and vulnerability to damage. This is no surprise to many people, but the interesting thing about feet is that whilst the dry air is doing us no favours, for some people their feet become less cracked because they are using closed in shoes and socks compared to the open sandals or thongs they were wearing in the summer. The enclosed shoes protect the skin better than open shoes and the increased padding often means the skin doesn't have to contend with as much direct pressure. Everyone is different though, even without mentioning dermatological conditions, so there is little advice that is appropriate for all, but if you are finding that the skin on your feet is starting to play up, it might be worth a trip to your podiatrist so we can help find out what works for you.

2. Don't rub me the wrong way

With winter and greater mobility comes less time in those lovely slip-ons that you should have binned years ago but haven't because they are so comfy, and more time in 'public' shoes like boots, flats or sneakers. Toes and feet which have had space to spare, all of a sudden back in shoes that are a little less forgiving than their 'around the house' cousins. So whilst closed in shoes have plenty of benefits, transitioning in to them can flare up issues like corns, aching bunions or cramped toes. Many of the issues can stem from decreased space at the front of shoe and unfortunately many people have shoes that are too narrow at the front to begin with, either due to poor fitting or even the style of the shoe. The best way to help this is to ensure a good fit to start with, although laced rather than zippered or slip on shoes can be helpful too as they allow more subtle adjustments to be made in tightness. It's also important to remember that whilst that pair of winter shoes in the back of the cupboard hasn't been worn, many shoes still have a 'shelf life' on the materials used to make them. They become stiffer, the soles harder and possibly even brittle and a once comfortable shoe starts niggling despite what appears to be limited wear. We podiatrists love looking at shoes and making sure they are doing the best for your feet, so we can give you more personalised advice if any of this seems familiar to you.

3. I like to move it move it

The last thing to think of in this time of change, is moving. Social isolation has meant that a lot of people have taken up, changed or pressed pause on their exercise routines for a multitude of reasons. These changes come with wonderful opportunities to start new habits or reinvigorate training, but many will be tempted to push too hard too quickly. There is little more discouraging than training hard only to get injured, so a few things to think about.

Any new activity, including walking/hiking or running, will require a learning curve so don't go hard out straight away. People often think that because walking and running are such intrinsic

activities to our function that they should be able to just go out and do it, but a sudden increase in loading on the body can injure regardless of how that occurs. So start with small, consistent sessions rather than big ones that require days to recover from and increase gradually. Try and make your training sustainable so that you won't burn out too or just throw out your progress once the regular routine returns. From our point of view it's also important to make sure that your footwear is in check. That pair of runners that have been knocking around for 4 years? Probably need replacing. That pair of gym shoes which have become your running shoes because you don't have anything else? Might not be the best idea.... This point is much easier made in person because the variety in foot biomechanics, shoe qualities and planned activities mean that recommendations need to be individualised, although shoes which are poorly fitted or more than 18months old are almost always candidates for replacement especially when putting your body under new stresses.

So those are just 3 things to think about in this time of change. Remember to stay safe and come in and make an appointment for more specific advice for your feet.