

Fit feet and Fitbits

LIVING 50 PLUS | Grant Gonzalez, DPM

The Digital Revolution is expanding its impact on our lives every minute. Smartphones, wireless internet networks, biometric authentication devices, virtual personal assistants, wristband gadgets and virtual reality devices are here today – and often gone tomorrow – as new technology redefines our future lifestyle opportunities and business models.

This revolution has had a profound impact on the health sector. The emergence of electronic health records (EHR) that are interconnected by exchanges allow a wide range of health data to be stored and shared. Patient portals are becoming more available as information systems are enhanced to provide patients with immediate access to their records. Other new medical device accessories are being introduced to the market that can be attached to a smartphone and paired with an app to provide EKG readings that detect abnormal heart rhythm, sleep apnea and hypertension. Individuals can immediately access data or have it transmitted to a health provider. Real-time biosensors are also being integrated into clothing, shoes and socks to analyze body function and performance. Experts predict that soon medical devices will be implanted in our body for continuous monitoring. Overall, these advancements are significantly improving the coordination and quality of care.

Patients are becoming “digitally engaged” as they incorporate new apps, fitness wristbands or clips (like Fitbit and Jawbone), into their daily routines to track activity, exercise, food, weight and sleep.

According to a recent article published by Fitbit, “Fitbit Profile and Update,” consumers are getting more involved in their health decisions. Digital technology

enables them to take better control of their health and to better manage their outcomes. Fitness trackers are gaining popularity and being incorporated into wellness programs and personalized coaching programs. There are over 23 million active Fitbit users. Users are becoming more social and creating networks and virtual fitness groups.

Undoubtedly, technology companies and health care providers that have a financial stake in this technology strongly support the expansion of fitness trackers. Employers also support this technology in an effort to curb rising health care costs. Health care practitioners are also in favor of technology that empowers people to self-manage and control their health.

Patients are encouraged to start smart by starting small. Don't rush into fitness. A modified approach will help you avoid injuries like shin splints and plantar fasciitis (heel pain). A steady, gradual program is more beneficial in the long run than an intense program that puts undue stress on your feet. Avoid running on uneven surfaces and terrain, at least during the initial stages of your fitness regime. Incorporate cross-training into your fitness program to reduce stress on your feet.

According to John Sigle, DPM, “Fitness activities can take a toll on your feet when



you begin workouts, so don't be surprised if you experience some aches and pains when you wake up in the morning. If the aches and pains persist as you progress in your workouts, it is a signal that you should consult with your podiatrist for a diagnosis and treatment to prevent further injury.” Ignoring aches and pains often results in more serious injury and will delay your fitness activities.

The majority of foot and ankle problems can be treated conservatively and resolved with simple adjustments like changing shoes and socks, or using shoe inserts and pads. Minor adjustments will



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help prevent blisters, corns and calluses, and help relieve any aches and pains you may feel in your legs, knees and hips.

Proper foot hygiene is essential to avoid problems. Trim your toenails properly and regularly. Keep your feet clean and dry and inspect them on a regular basis. Foot blisters, nerve compression foot injuries, stress fractures of the lower leg, foot and ankle should be examined by a podiatrist. This includes foot infections, ingrown toenails and toenail fungus. People should consult with their physician or podiatrist prior to engaging in a vigorous exercise program if they are overweight or have diabetes, peripheral neuropathy or peripheral artery disease.

Most health care practitioners are in favor of engaging in an exercise conditioning program 1-2 months prior to beginning a strenuous physical fitness program. To get the most out of your exercise program, it's essential to prepare your feet properly for training so they will carry you where you need to go.

Consult with your podiatrist about exercises that will help condition your feet and lower extremities to prevent injury. These exercises will help you build strength in your lower leg, foot and ankle, build flexibility and improve range of motion, and condition specific muscles, tendons and ligaments that control the movement of your feet and ankles.

This new year, you can make a difference in the quality of your life if you have a solid foundation supporting your movements. Don't be afraid to incorporate smart devices into your workouts to improve your health. Start out slow and start out smart – and schedule a consultation with your podiatrist if you are experiencing foot or ankle pain that is hindering your ability to work out. □

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