

For Feet's Sake

It's estimated that we'll walk the equivalent of three times around the world in our lifetimes. So why don't we care about the transport?

BY MATT CLEARY

ONE OF THE BEST scenes from *Pulp Fiction* has Jules and Vincent strolling down a corridor discussing foot massage. Jules says not to talk to him about it because he's "the foot freakin' master" (or words to that effect), while Vincent asserts that Antwan Rockamora – half-black, half-Samoan – "shoulda better known better" before he laid his hands in a familiar way on the feet of the big man's wife.

This is a rare cinematic example of our feet receiving the recognition they deserve. Great hair, teeth or eyes get saturation coverage onscreen, while our faithful plates of meat seldom rate even a footnote.

Is there a more underrated appendage? They support you from your first step to your last and every one of the 192 million in between. They'll take you into pubs, around golf courses and across the crowded room to the woman of your dreams. And how do you repay them?

You stuff them into ill-fitting, airless, leather coffins, let your nails grow into

goblin's talons, pound them on bitumen and treat them like laboratories for mutant strains of fungus. Admit it: you take your feet for granted.

PROTECT

Foot injuries can manifest as pain in your ankles, calves, hamstrings, hips and lower back. They contain 52 bones and a complex network of muscles, ligaments and joints.

Podiatrist Andrew Bull of Sydney's Sports and Performance Clinic ([02] 9251 0822; www.sportswise.com.au), says the majority of Australians have problems with "over-pronating", meaning their feet collapse too much when they walk.

"Like a parachutist hitting the ground, feet need to roll inwards when they land to absorb shock," advises Bull. "But if your arches collapse, your shin muscles overstretch, your knee caps grind against the joint, your hips rotate and your pelvis tilts forward, increasing your lumbar curve."

During an examination, he'll establish the height of your arch, if you're placing

too much weight on the big toes, if your feet point inwards or outwards and how bowlegged or knock-kneed you are. Then he'll shoot you dead. Just kidding. What he'll really do is offer important advice.

"The wrong pair can exacerbate a problem. If you're an over-pronator in a soft shoe, it can make your arches collapse further. Alternately, if a person who doesn't roll enough wears a heavy, motion-control shoe, they'll supinate, which can lead to stress fractures," cautions Bull. (Check out the box on the opposite page for his tips on treating common foot faults.)

PREPARE

When the Sydney Swans turn up for pre-season AFL training, one of the first men they see is podiatrist Michael Kinchington.

"We test their biomechanical efficiency," he reveals. "It's vital for injury prevention and performance. If they're inefficient, we try to improve stability."

This involves preventative maintenance exercises (which look like they could be performed while watching cricket or nursing a beer) like calf and Achilles stretching; wobble- or balance-board work (try the Vew-Do Balance 101, \$179.95; call [1800] 081 180 or check out www.obi.com.au for stockists); and stretching using resistance elastic (try the Thera-band, \$28.70; call [1800] 333 153 for stockists). At the gym, work out on the seated calf-raise machine.

PAMPER

If you ever want to know what it's like to be brought back from the dead, then a pedicure is an accurate comparison. Was Jesus more relaxed during biblical debates after a refreshing foot bath? You bet he was. *Men's Health* visited Sydney's Your Sanctuary Day Spa (www.yoursanctuary.com.au; [02] 9360 5000) to see what it was all about.

First your feet receive a soapy bath and scrub. Once your hoofs are as pink and soft as poached salmon, beauty therapist Dagmar Andryskova uses an exfoliator to remove dead skin. (That's what corns are – masses of dead cells.) Then comes a razor, which is a bit like a potato peeler, to shave off the nobby bits.

Next, a series of soft, pencil-like implements are used to clean around the toenails, digging out any grunge. For a man's feet to be attractive, according to Dagmar, they must be "nice and clean" with nothing in the nails. "Sometimes you

see nice, open-toed shoes and think 'wow'," she says. "But then you look at the feet and they haven't been cleaned and it's not enticing."

Dagmar recommends moisturising after you shower and before going to bed "while your skin is resting". Pharmacies have foot sprays similar to antiperspirants to keep your feet dry. "Look for tea-tree or eucalyptus oil," advises Dagmar. "They're antibacterial. Spray some in your shoes as well." (We liked Thursday Plantation Tea Tree Foot Spray, \$4.45.)

Next comes the fabled foot massage, the most pleasing experience you can have with your pants on. Dagmar recommends you use a thick body lotion (try Palmer's Cocoa Butter, \$7.75).

Make a heart shape with your hands, thumbs together and reasonably firm and move them up the foot, massaging the sole with your fingers. Then focus on individual areas – the sole, heel, ankle, calf, thigh . . .

Finally, your feet will be inserted into plastic bags filled with warm paraffin wax. We kid you not. You'll then relax and read the paper while your feet relax in their comforting cocoons. Ten minutes later the bags are removed and your pins emerge, chrysalis-like, from their waxy womb, revitalised like a leper touched by the hand of god.

PRACTICAL

Podiatrist Andrew Bull on the best shoes for:



► **Golf:** "They need to be supportive with reasonable grip. Your swing demands a shoe that bends in the forefoot. Leather is good or mesh that breathes." We like: Oakley "Neck Tye", \$249. Waterproof; supportive base; non-slip heel. Enquiries: (1800) 625 539.



► **Jogging:** "Most brand shoes are good, but you still have to pick one that's right for you. The more curved the sole, the softer the shoe; the straighter, the more anti-pronation features. Pick the sole for the surface; you don't want it smooth if you're trail running." We like: New Balance "1221", \$220. Rear and forefoot cushioning; mid-foot support; lightweight; durable; comes in three width sizes. Enquiries: (1800) 654 512.



► **Hiking:** "The mesh-style boots like Hi-Teks and Scarpas have everything from day-trip to very stiff, arctic-mountaineering

boots. Again, pick the shoe for the surface, but you don't want a heavy boot in the Australian summer." We like: Kathmandu "Hounslow Sympatex", \$379.50. One-piece leather; water-resistant; breathable. Enquiries: (1800) 333 414.



► **Tennis:** "Being on the balls of your feet, you need something strong with a heavy-duty tread pattern. The lighter the better, but tennis shoes should be reinforced around the toecap. They can't have anti-pronation features because tennis has side-to-side movement." We like: Adidas "Barricade", \$200. Durable outsole; shock-absorbent midsole and forefoot. Call (1800) 801 891.



► **Business:** "If you're on your feet a lot, get something with a rubber sole. Good business shoes are built like running shoes. Go for leather, but ensure it's not poly-coated because it won't breathe as effectively." We like: Hush Puppies "Action", \$129.95. Soft, supple leather upper and lining; moulded removable insole; lightweight; flexible. Enquiries: (1800) 651 185.



► **Casual:** "A must for summer is a pair of open-toed slides," advises *Men's Health* Style Editor Natasha Paulini. "They're great with jeans, shorts, pants – anything really. And they'll let your hoofs breathe." We like: Camper "Ethnic" slides, \$270. Water-resistant, sturdy leather; moulded sole; a fashion edge with the plaited upper. Call (02) 9970 5580.

SYMPTOM	SOUNDS LIKE . . .	CAUSED BY . . .	HOW YOU FIX IT . . .
Foot odour.	Athlete's Foot	Fungus that thrives in hot, humid environments, such as communal gyms, showers or pool decking; bad foot hygiene; sweaty feet.	Keep your feet cool, dry (fungus loves heat and moisture) and clean and scrub them each night. Use anti-fungal creams (we liked Lamisil, RRP: \$13.55). Don't wear the same shoes two days in a row – they won't dry out overnight. Walk around barefoot in the sunshine during your lunch hour before putting on a fresh pair of socks. Wear thongs in public showers and changing rooms. Check out www.fungusfreenails.com .
Feet collapse inwards.	Over-pronation	Low arches; poor biomechanics; bowlegs; overly soft shoes; tight calves.	Calf-stretches; supportive shoes; orthotics.
Feet lean outwards.	Supination	High arches; fusion of joints due to injury; shoes with excessive motion control; hereditary factors.	Softer shoes; customised orthotics to allow feet to roll inwards.
Inflamed, painful arches.	Plantar fasciitis	Tight calves; over-pronation; repeated high impact on hard surfaces; unsupportive shoes.	Rest; anti-inflammatory tablets or cream; calf stretches; supportive shoes; orthotics.
Painful front and inside edge of shins.	Shin splints	Tight calves; over-pronation; bowlegs; unsupportive shoes; high impact on hard surfaces.	Rest; run on a softer surface to reduce impact; shin and calf stretches; supportive shoes; orthotics.
Pain across the balls of your feet.	Metatarsalgia	Toe-running; tight or worn-out shoes; over-pronation.	Focus on ensuring heel contact when distance running; correct shoe fitting; custom orthotics with metatarsal dome.
Swelling and pain that increases the longer you're on your feet.	Stress fractures (tiny breaks due to the overloading of your bones).	Poor biomechanics; over-training; reduced bone density.	Rest immediately and see your podiatrist or sports-medicine specialist. Choose the right footwear and do calf, Achilles and hamstring stretches before, after and even during a run. Select your training surface wisely. Ease into it when returning.
Toenails growing into the skin.	Ingrown toenails	Picking; incorrect trimming; inherited brittle nails.	Cut your nails straight across so that the corners are above the skin.

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