



Marfan Feet



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FEATURES OF MARFAN FEET

Marfan syndrome can affect many parts of a person's body, including the feet. In Marfan feet, extra-loose ligaments and extra-long bones can make the feet weak and less able to manage the pressure when people stand up. Here are some features that are common in Marfan feet.

- Long, thin feet
- Flat feet (very low arch) or extra-high arch
- Long toes
- Hammer and claw toes (abnormal bending of the toes)
- Calluses (thick layers of skin) caused by too much pressure on one part of the foot
- Bunions (bone growth near the base of the big toe)
- Turned ankles (medial displacement)

However, just because you have Marfan feet does not mean you will have pain or other problems.

CHECKING YOUR MARFAN FEET

Your doctor should always check your feet and ankles—whether you have foot problems, or not. Doctors who know about feet include orthopedic surgeons, rehabilitation specialists (physiatrists), and podiatrists. Your doctor should check:

- Range of motion—how easily and far you can turn your ankles and feet
- The exact place of your pain (if any)
- The strength of your tendons
- The fit of your shoes
- Your gait (how you move) when you run, walk, and walk on your toes

If you have problems due to Marfan feet, your doctor is likely to ask:

- How long have you had these problems?
- Are the problems getting worse?
- How severe (bad) are your foot problems?
- Do your feet hurt most in the morning or at night?
- Do foot problems keep you from doing certain activities?
- Do your feet hurt after standing for a few hours, walking a lot, or doing other activities?

FLAT FEET

Flat feet are common in people who have Marfan syndrome. Flat feet do not always cause problems or pain. Here are some facts about flat feet:

- Flat feet are more common in children than in adults.
- Studies show that arch supports do not cause children to develop higher arches.
- Your doctor should check flat feet periodically. Most people can safely do nothing about them.
- Flat feet do not cause back pain. But they might cause knee pain because the feet affect how knees move.
- People sometimes need surgery when it is hard to stand on tiptoes or “push off” while walking because of very flexible flat feet.

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FOOT PAIN

Foot pain can be caused by arthritis, pressure on one part of the foot, tired muscles, or calluses. You should try to manage foot pain without surgery. Here are some ways:

- Wear shoes that support your feet. These shoes should feel comfortable, not tight.
- Put orthotics (shoe inserts) inside your shoes only if needed to ease pressure, provide support, and make shoes fit better. Orthotics should only be used when there is pain. If orthotics do not fit well, they can make pain worse. You can start with off-the-shelf orthotics, but if they do not help, custom-made orthotics (made just for you) may be better.
- Use an ankle brace (ankle-foot orthoses, or AFO) if you need help with ankle weakness and tired muscles. Ask your doctor which type of AFO is right for you.
- Stretch and do exercises to make your feet muscles stronger. This can include stretching for plantar fasciitis (an inflammation of a ligament that helps form the foot arch).

SURGERY

Sometimes people with Marfan feet need surgery. This should only be done when all other treatments fail and there is no way to manage pain. Surgery does not always help people with Marfan feet (compared to surgery for people who do not have Marfan syndrome). There are many types of surgery. They include:

- Osteotomy—which changes (realigns) the position of bones to improve how pressure is spread in the foot.
- Fusing joints (arthrodesis)—for pain caused by arthritis. This type of surgery joins the ends of the bones together so that certain joints can no longer move.
- Hammertoe repair—to keep toes straight by moving toe tendons or fusing toe joints. This surgery should only be done to reduce pain and not to change how toes look.

There is no proven success for people with Marfan feet using artificial ankles or toe joints.

WAYS TO PREVENT MARFAN FEET PROBLEMS

You cannot always prevent problems due to Marfan feet, but there are things to try before problems occur:

- Stay the right weight for your height.
- Wear shoes that fit well, add support, and have low heels. You may be able to find these shoes on the Internet, although there might be just a few styles. Of note, these shoes can cost a lot but many people say that they are worth the money when you have Marfan feet.

WAYS TO LEARN MORE

- Contact the Marfan Syndrome Support Group Ireland at info@marfan.ie.
- Talk to your doctor. Sometimes it helps to use information like this fact sheet when you speak with the doctor.
- Visit the Marfan Syndrome Support Group website at www.marfan.ie.