Dear Alice!

I work ten-hour days, four-days-a-week, standing in one spot. The bottom of my feet feel like a lot of needles are pricking my soles. Could you please tell me what could be causing this? Just started about one month ago.

Answer

Dear Reader,

As you know, standing in place for an extended period of time can be much harder than it seems. In fact, standing in one spot for too long can lead to serious health consequences, such as poor blood circulation, hypertension, improper posture and spinal alignment, and swelling of the legs and feet. In the United States, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration [2] program (which functions under the Department of Labor [3]) makes it very clear that all Americans have the right to a safe and healthful workplace. There are several reasonable steps you may take to take charge of your situation, as well as some suggestions you may make to your employer to improve your foot pain. Pain that feels tingly or similar to pins and needles can be indicative of various health conditions, and you shouldn’t stand for it.

Many jobs require standing all day, whether in one place, or within a specified environment. For example, teachers, retail salespeople, bank tellers, cleaners, production line workers, waiters, machine operators, hairdressers, museum employees, bar staff, lab and medical technicians, construction workers, and security guards all work on their feet. Although between one-third and half of all workers spend more than four hours per day on their feet (either standing still or walking), some jobs require much more standing than others. Indeed, between 50-70 percent of U.S. workers stand for at least 75 percent of the workday, although the Trades Union Congress [4] of the United Kingdom recommends that workers spend no longer than 30 percent of the workday on their feet. Standing for too long can lead to the following health issues, all of which become more severe with age:

- Bunions, varicose veins [5], corns, heel spurs, foot fungus, and flat feet
- Plantar fasciitis [6]
- Achilles tendonitis
- Muscle soreness, achiness, and fatigue
- Foot and leg swelling [7]
- Poor circulation, reducing blood flow between the feet and legs and the heart

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• Heart and circulatory disorders that may cause hypertension comparable to 20 years of aging
• Soft tissue strain, injury, and inflammation
• Exacerbation of existing coronary heart disease and venous insufficiency
• Hip, knee, and ankle joint compression and damage that increase arthritis risk
• Low back pain, neck and shoulder stiffness
• Atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries in the heart
• Preterm delivery and reduced birth weights among pregnant women who stand in place longer than three hours at a time

Although standing all day is not ideal, having the freedom to move around a bit is helpful and may work to prevent some of the health risks listed above. Because you have to stand in place and are unable to walk around, here are a few tips you might consider trying:

• Wear comfortable and supportive shoes. Heels higher than four centimeters may cause improper spinal alignment, leading to muscle tension and pain. If you can avoid heels altogether, pick out a pair of shoes that do not change your foot shape and have supportive arches and shock absorbing padding (or room for supportive insoles). Make sure to have each foot measured, because your feet might be different sizes. Also ensure your toes have enough wiggle room at the front of your shoes; there should be at least one centimeter of space between your longest toe and the tip of the shoe.
• Use a slightly raised surface to rest one foot on while standing, and alternate every so often. A foot stool or phonebook may do the trick.
• Eliminate any unnecessary material in your work environment that prevents you from standing in a balanced position. Uneven weight distribution may lead to poor posture and abnormal blood circulation.
• Stand with one foot in front of the other as opposed to side-by-side positioning to encourage weight shifting and movement.
• If you’re overweight, consider losing weight to alleviate stress on the joints exacerbated by standing.

If you’ve already exhausted these options and you’re still experiencing pain, you should speak up to your employer and advocate for workplace redesign efforts. Consider offering the following suggestions:

• Identify and eliminate hazards and risks to the health of all employees by conducting a risk assessment as mandated by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations of 1999.
• Implement adjustable work surfaces and equipment that allow employees to directly face their work and avoid uncomfortable positions.
• Use work areas that give employees enough space to move and sit comfortably.
• Give employees plenty of breaks to move around, sit, stretch, or rest.
• Provide sufficient seating in employee lounges and break rooms.
• Use wooden, cork, or rubber floors or mats to absorb shock and put less stress on employees’ joints.
• Establish a formalized reporting or mediation process for workers who experience work-related health issues.
• Offer optional foot rails, footrests, elbow supports, and padded kneelers.

You have the right to be safe and comfortable at work. Hopefully you’ll be able to find relief for your foot pain by trying out some of the recommendations above. If not, you might
consider scheduling an appointment with a health care provider to conduct testing and create an individualized treatment plan. With a little patience and effort, you’ll be able to conquer your foot pain and move forward with your work.

Alice!
Category: General Health
Aches, Pains & Other Ailments

Related questions
Swollen feet
All about athlete’s foot
What causes bunions?
Cart Pushing: How to prevent muscle aches
Surgery for heel spur syndrome?
Plantar fasciitis

Resources
Medical Services (Morningside)
Medical Services (CUMC)

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