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 your experience shows, 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 may lead to health consequences, such as poor blood circulation and improper posture and spinal alignment. 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 healthy workplace environment. Pain that feels tingly or similar to pins and needles may be indicative of various health conditions. There are several steps you can take to manage your situation, as well as some suggestions to pass on to your employer to help improve your foot pain.

Reader, the feeling you're describing sounds a lot like “pins and needles,” which is an uncomfortable tingling or pricking feeling often felt in the hands, legs, and feet. This sensation is most often caused by compression of the nerves in a specific area from increased or prolonged pressure. You might find that the feeling resolves when you change positions or remove the pressure. However, if this sensation persists despite shifting positions or removing any source of added pressure, it may be indicative of a more serious health condition. At that point, it might be worth visiting with your health care provider for further evaluation and potential treatment options.
If this feeling is due to the amount of time you spend standing, you aren’t alone in your discomfort. Many jobs require standing all day, whether in one place, or within a specified environment. Some jobs require much more standing than others with approximately 33 to 50 percent of workers on their feet for more than four hours (either standing still or walking). There are a number of health issues that come about when standing for long periods of time, all of which become more severe with age:

- Bunions, varicose veins, corns, heel spurs, foot fungus, flat feet, plantar fasciitis, arthritis, and Achilles tendonitis
- Muscle soreness, achingness, and fatigue
- Foot and leg swelling
- Poor circulation
- Heart and circulatory disorders that may cause hypertension
- Soft tissue strain, injury, and inflammation
- Low back pain and neck and shoulder stiffness
- Atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries in the heart
- Preterm delivery and reduced birth weights among pregnant people who stand in place longer than three hours at a time

Although standing all day isn’t ideal, there are a few tips you might consider trying in order to prevent some of the health risks and alleviate some of the discomfort:

- Wear comfortable and supportive shoes. Avoid heels, if possible, and choose shoes that don’t change your foot shape, have supportive arches, and shock absorbing padding. Make sure to have each foot measured to ensure your toes have enough wiggle room at the front of your shoes — it’s ideal to have 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 a thick book may do the trick.
- Make sure the surface you’re standing on is flat so that your weight is distributed evenly.
- Stand with one foot in front of the other as opposed to side-by-side to encourage weight shifting and movement.

If you’ve already exhausted these options and you’re still experiencing pain, it might be time to speak up to your employer and advocate for workplace redesign efforts to the extent that you can. Some of the recommendations or changes that you suggest your employer could make may include:

- Implementing adjustable work surfaces and equipment that allow employees to directly face their work and avoid uncomfortable positions
- Using work areas that give employees enough space to move and sit comfortably
- Providing employees plenty of breaks to move around, sit, stretch, or rest
- Offering 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 these recommendations. If not, you might consider scheduling an appointment with a health care provider to figure out the appropriate course of
action to help with the pins and needles sensation. Best of luck to you and your feet!

Alice!

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