

# Healthy Soles

BY SHANNON MARTIN

**O**n average, a person absorbs more than 1.5 million pounds (680,000 kg) of impact through his or her feet each day. The foot's shape, along with the body's natural balance system, makes humans capable of not only walking, but also running, climbing, and countless other activities.

The position and function of the feet (and footwear that doesn't work properly with the body's alignment) can lead to problems that affect the whole body. In Traditional Chinese medicine, the condition of the feet is crucial to overall health and is considered a separate body related to all body parts and organs (see sidebar on reflexology).

*Vaishali Patel, the podiatrist at Body & Soul-Medical Clinics, answered some of our biggest questions about foot health for the Shanghai expat.*

## WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON FOOT ISSUES YOU SEE IN SHANGHAI?

Wearing open shoes in the dusty, polluted environment of Shanghai seems to exacerbate fissures (small cracks in the skin) on the heel and even the toes. Toenail fungus and other fungal issues are also a common problem, especially

due to the year-round humidity here. I treat a variety of other common problems such as foot pain, fallen arches, plantar fasciitis, stress fractures, bunions/toe deformities and nail pathologies. Unfortunately, I see a lot of people who have been treated improperly by general practitioners (or given extreme treatment such as very harsh medicines).

## WHAT TIPS CAN WE INCORPORATE FOR HEALTHY FEET?

Practice good foot hygiene by regularly cleaning between the toes and keeping them dry; using talcum powder can also help reduce moisture. It is generally best to wear a little hose or sock to absorb moisture and protect from dirt. Keeping the feet exfoliated and moisturized is important. Unfortunately, sometimes the pedicures and foot massages here can be a little overzealous and too much exfoliating may worsen fissures. Products like tea tree oil offer great natural antibacterial properties for keeping fungus and other concerns at bay.

## WHAT ARE THE BEST SHOES TO WEAR?

The best shoes depend on the person's foot. You may have heard that heels are bad, but for someone with a high arch, a bit of a heel may be best. It is important that the shoe is supportive and fits your foot well. With Shanghai's humid environment, breathable materials are best. Don't forget the walking environment when choosing a shoe. The sidewalks and streets here are often uneven and cracked, making it even more important to have supportive footwear (beware of skinny heels which can easily get stuck in a crack and send you tumbling!).

As footwear gets changed out for the season, I'll often see an increase in nail and toe problems. Since the foot can affect the entire body and lead to back pain and more, we assess foot issues and footwear as a whole. Some people may need orthotics/inserts for best results. You can have nice looking shoes without sacrificing your health. 🍻

*Shannon Martin relocated to Shanghai from the U.S. with her husband two years ago. She does writing and marketing projects for several companies. For information about Vaishali Patel, visit [www.tcm-shanghai.com](http://www.tcm-shanghai.com).*

Reflexology and foot massage are a popular tradition in China and can be found throughout Shanghai. "Foot reflexology is an applied pressure therapy that involves stimulating reflex points on the foot. These reflex points correspond to specific areas of the body, to produce therapeutic benefits,"

says Jessica Martin, a physiotherapist for Body and Soul who was trained in European foot reflexology. Practitioners caution those with foot problems or past/present injuries to steer away from reflexology unless done by a practitioner with proper training.

