

The humble foot

Hidden away inside your designer shoes for too long, it's time to pay some respect to your amazing feet. *By Janet Philp*

Imagine, if you will, a beautiful structure. It starts from a single point beside you and two elegant divergent arches prance off into the distance. These two arches are joined at their ends by a third shorter arch. From each point they reach up to an apex to form an elongated pyramid that caresses the ground at the three points, the rest of the structure held aloft by the arches. This is a structure on which you could balance the weight of the world. It would win awards for architecture, people would travel the world to see it.

What would we, as the human race, do with such a thing of beauty and elegance, this masterpiece of structural design? Well, obviously, we would shove it inside a container that distorts and contorts it such that its integral architecture is lost. This is what we do with our feet everyday.

The foot is a masterpiece of design or evolution, depending on your viewpoint; some 28 bones arranged into three arches. A medial arch that gives flexibility, the ability to cope with uneven surfaces; a lateral arch that has fewer joints and so lends itself to stability; and a transverse arch that, along with the others, can store the energy placed in the foot as it contacts the ground and use that energy to propel the body forward. A feat no computer can yet replicate.

The foot has 200,000 sensory nerve endings in it and the majority of the body's proprioceptors are around the ankle. It makes sense then to place it in a hard outer shell where it can't get any feedback from the environment and where the arches can't work properly, doesn't it? No, it does not.

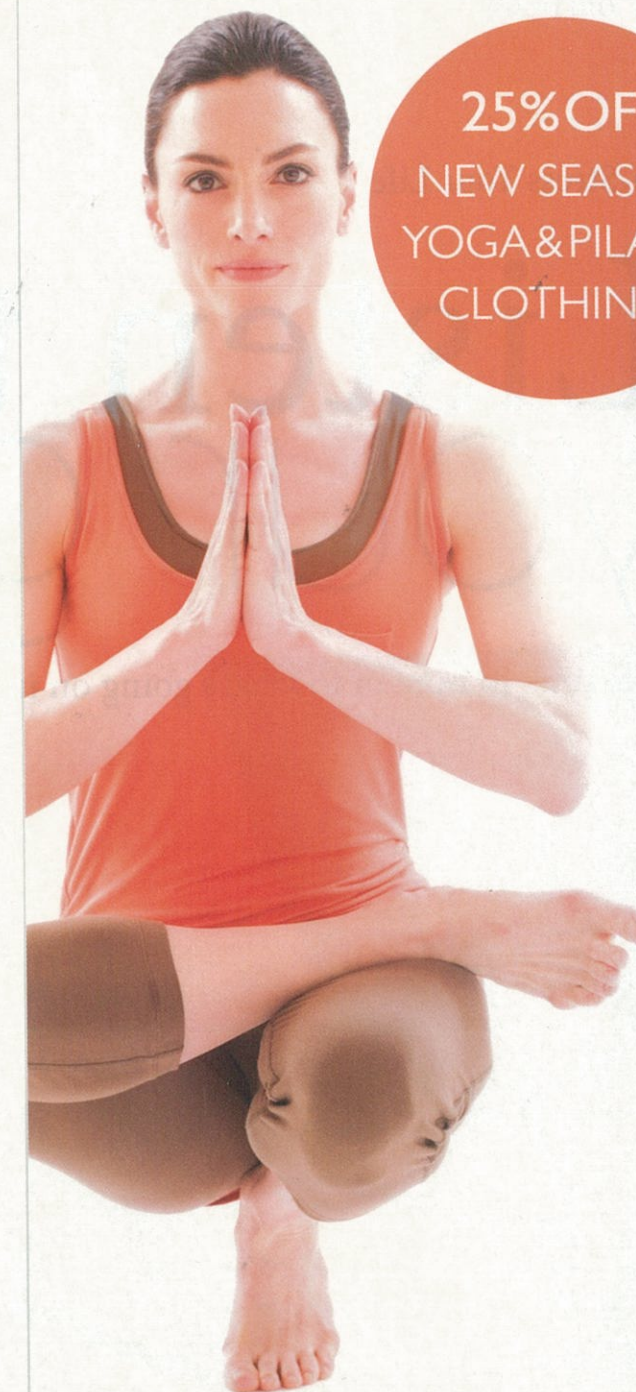
“Try to go barefoot when you can and give your arches the chance to do the job they were designed for. There are a growing number of walking classes, showing people how to use their feet properly.”

Barefoot technology is still viewed with some skepticism but it has been nearly 30 years since scientists started to publish data suggesting that running without shoes actually reduces injury. The foot is the body's connection to the earth. If we wrap it in protective padding then the body slams it into the ground harder, to get the feedback it needs. If you think about it, it makes sense.

The structural elegance of the arched support system is undermined if the back point is elevated, such as wearing heels. The foot loses its ability to function properly and the lumbar spine is thrown out of alignment. When did our society agree that the inability to walk properly was sexy?

Seventeen years after the original Die Hard movie, where it was suggested that the best way to unwind after a flight was to go barefoot and scrunch your toes up, we get published data that being barefoot actually does reduce your blood pressure.

Try to go barefoot when you can and give your arches the chance to do the job they were designed for. There are a growing number of walking classes, showing people how to use their feet properly. You might think it is something people can't usually master in their first year but you would be surprised. Your feet are capable of so much more than just being a clothes horse for the latest Jimmy Choo. Each one is an anatomical masterpiece. Use them wisely. ॐ



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Janet Philp

Janet Philp has spent a lifetime exploring fitness and wellbeing. Starting as group exercise, travelling through rugby to representing the UK at martial arts before including yoga, meditation, Budokon and personal instruction. Her passion is anatomical function and educating people to use their bodies to their potential. She is the founder of fitnessphilp.com