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Preventing numb feet on the elliptical trainer

By Lisa Maloney on December 7, 2012 in

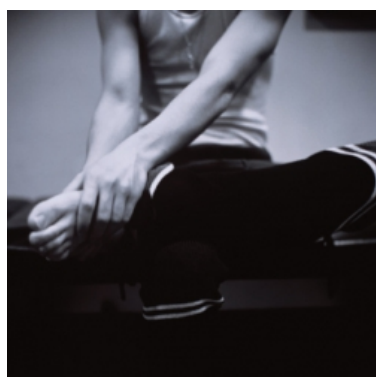
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Exercisers with joint injuries often flock toward the low-impact workout of an elliptical trainer. Because your feet never come off the elliptical's pedals, you can run as fast as you want without having to endure the usual impact with every footfall. But as [Dr. Michele S. Olson](#), an exercise physiologist with the American College of Sports Medicine, explains, the pedal-based workout can also contribute to what some have dubbed "numb foot" or "sleepy-foot syndrome."

"The constant pressure on the foot can compress both the nerves serving the muscles in the feet as well as the blood vessels that supply oxygen-fresh blood to the foot muscles," she explained in an email interview. Dr. Olson also warned that wearing too-tight shoes, or shoes with a lot of wear and little padding, can increase your likelihood of numb feet during an elliptical trainer workout.

Not everybody experiences numb feet when pedaling an elliptical, but it was a common complaint of the many user reviews we evaluated for our [full report](#). The good news is that a few smart choices can cut down on your chance of foot numbness. Dr. Olson recommends easing into your elliptical exercise program gradually, wearing good shoes that aren't laced up too tightly, and wiggling your toes around every so often as you exercise. Also, do what you can to avoid putting your feet, legs and hips through the exact same movement pattern every time you work out. This includes spending part of your workout pedaling backwards if your elliptical trainer allows it (most do). "This can redistribute some of the pressure pattern on the feet and may alleviate or prevent numbness," Dr. Olson explains.

Other side affects

Numb feet are not the only thing to watch out for when using an elliptical trainer. If you have hip or pelvis problems they may be aggravated by the range of motion required to fit your body to the elliptical trainer's stride length. A vulnerable neck can also be bothered by using the moving handlebars on most elliptical trainers, leading to neck and shoulder tightness.

Choosing the right elliptical trainer

Knowing what to look for when you buy your elliptical trainer is one way of ensuring comfortable, safe workouts. "The stride should feel smooth, not bumpy or jerky," Dr. Olson recommends. Look for a model with articulating pedals that flex and extend, allowing your ankles to move more as you pedal. Hand rails or handgrips that are high enough to elevate your hands somewhat, but low enough that you're still relaxed, will help position your upper body correctly.

The doctor cautions users not to lean on the bars. They are there to help you maintain your balance, not to prop you up. Finally, look for an adjustable stride. "The more variable, the better," Dr. Olson adds, "because you will want to vary your stride sometimes every 10 to 15 minutes during use, or by using a different stride on different days."

For more qualities to look for when buying an elliptical trainer, see our [buying guide](#).

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