

DEAD on Your Feet?

Find the Right Shoes

BY JILL JANOV, ASRT STAFF WRITER

After standing on concrete floors all day, Debra Cooley's feet began to hurt. The staff technologist compensated by adjusting the way she walked. But that caused additional strain to her lower back, hips and knees.

A smile on Debra Cooley's face means she's got ErgoMates on her feet.

The 43-year-old from Georgia

tried an assortment of ergonomic shoes. Nothing worked and her foot pain persisted. Then Debra remembered a product she saw in a laboratory supply catalog — antifatigue cushioned mats called ErgoMates that strap to shoes. She tried them over running shoes even though they seemed bulky and ugly.

“I’ve had some patients say ‘Good grief! What are you wearing on your feet?’ with a sound of disgust and I’ve had some ask just out of curiosity,” Debra said. “They are definitely a conversation starter.”

Fifty dollars and two months later, Debra’s pain was reduced significantly. “It’s like walking on clouds all day,” she said.

Foot pain is a common ailment among medical imaging technologists and radiation therapists who are forced to stand on hard surfaces for long shifts. Finding the right shoes to avoid foot pain can be a difficult and expensive process.

“I have tried a lot of different shoes — Crocs, Anywhere Shoes, running shoes, walking shoes,” said Chris Davids Pfeiffer, R.T.(R), from Toledo, Ohio. “I have finally settled on Dansko. I love them. Great support, very durable and they last a long, long time. Yes, they are a lot more expensive than a \$30 pair of Crocs, but I have had mine for over two years now and they still feel great.”

Dansko clogs, at approximately \$110, are popular in the health care arena, especially among R.T.s.

“I wear Danskos. They are the absolute best shoes ever. I have problems with my back, and they really help,” said Jennifer Feintuch, R.T.(R), of West Palm Beach, Fla., who works 12-hour shifts. “I will wear sneakers every once in a while and by the end of the day I am usually very uncomfortable. I always go back to my Danskos.”

Clogs are popular among R.T.s because they support the legs and back, said Angela Anderson, product manager for Sanita Clogs, the maker of the Dansko stapled clogs for 17 years.

“The clog height is what gives it the ability to reduce that fatigue,” Angela said. “When you support the foot at the arch, the legs and back are relaxed because they don’t have to do the work of the arch. The whole body benefits.”

Sanita stopped making shoes for Dansko in 2007. The company continues to make the original stapled clog in its Denmark and Eastern Europe facilities and sells them worldwide under its own brand name, Sanita. Angela said Dansko has found a new manufacturer in China to make its clogs.

Crocs work shoes are another popular choice among health care workers because they are bacteriostatic, slip resistant, bacteria and

odor resistant, flexible, durable, comfortable and inexpensive. They also can be cleaned easily with soap and water. According to a study using pressure mapping and muscle effort monitoring, Crocs work shoes were proven to reduce muscle fatigue up to 62.6 percent more than standing barefoot, said Claire Tindall of Crocs Inc.

“Improper shoes can lead to health problems such as bunions, heel pain, Achilles tendon problems and deformed toes, as well as nerve damage,” Claire said. “It’s important to wear footwear with proper arch support and enough room for your toes to move. Anyone who has ever worn uncomfortable shoes for a long period of time knows firsthand the negative effects that they can have on their comfort; the pain and discomfort often lasts long after the shoes are off.”

There are 26 bones, 33 joints and more than 100 tendons, muscles and ligaments in the human foot to give it mobility and support the body. Injury or inflammation can occur when a small part of this complex structure breaks down because of stress caused by the wrong shoes or prolonged standing on hard surfaces.

“As an R.T., you can imagine how hard this environment is on a person’s feet, legs and back. I developed severe plantar fasciitis where the pain was so intense I was

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going to have to quit my job,” said Pamela May, R.T.(R), of Meridian, Miss. “Other staff members were wearing Z-CoiL footwear and praising them, saying the shoes had changed their lives. I tried on a coworker’s shoes and my pain was instantly gone.”

The footwear worked so well for Pamela that she not only purchased a pair of the \$200 shoes, she also opened two Z-CoiL franchises in Mississippi, which she operates in addition to working part time as an

R.T. “You have to put aside the fact that it is an ugly shoe because pain is ugly, too,” Pamela added.

Z-CoiL shoes contain steel coils that compress during heel-strike like shock absorbers to reduce impact to the body. They also feature a built-in orthotic that provides important arch support and helps to improve posture.

“By placing your body in proper alignment, the footwear also helps reduce fatigue to your feet, legs and back while standing in one spot for

hours at a time, especially if you’re wearing a lead apron,” said Carla Salizzoni, a marketing manager for Z-CoiL.

Chuck Henderson, R.T.(R), a 59-year-old radiographer who works at the Raymond G. Murphy Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Albuquerque, N.M., has been wearing Z-CoiL shoes for six years.

“Three weeks after I started wearing them, my heel pain went away. It actually worked,” Chuck said. “Yes, they are very odd looking, but

enough people in the hospital wear them so it's become commonplace.”

Tracey E. Banks, R.T.(R)(M)(CT), alternates between her Danskos and Pearl Izumis while working 10-hour shifts at Heart of the Rockies Regional Medical Center in Salida, Colo. Pearl Izumis, which cost \$95-\$125, are built for running but offer a supportive and seamless construction that also could work for standing and walking, said Geoff Shaffer, marketing director of the shoe company.

“My feet tend to hurt if I stay with one shoe all the time,” said Tracey, a 35-year-old cyclist. “I wear Danskos and a Pearl Izumi running shoe that has great support. I think being active outside of work has helped me stay strong at work as well. The body definitely takes a lot of abuse being a technologist and taking care of it now is key.”

Tracey does not consider herself especially trendy, but she said she could never imagine wearing bulky Z-CoiLs or ErgoMates. Not only are they tremendously conspicuous and distracting, but she said they could generate unwanted ribbing and mockery from patients and coworkers.

She also realizes she is lucky to have found a winning combination of form and function.

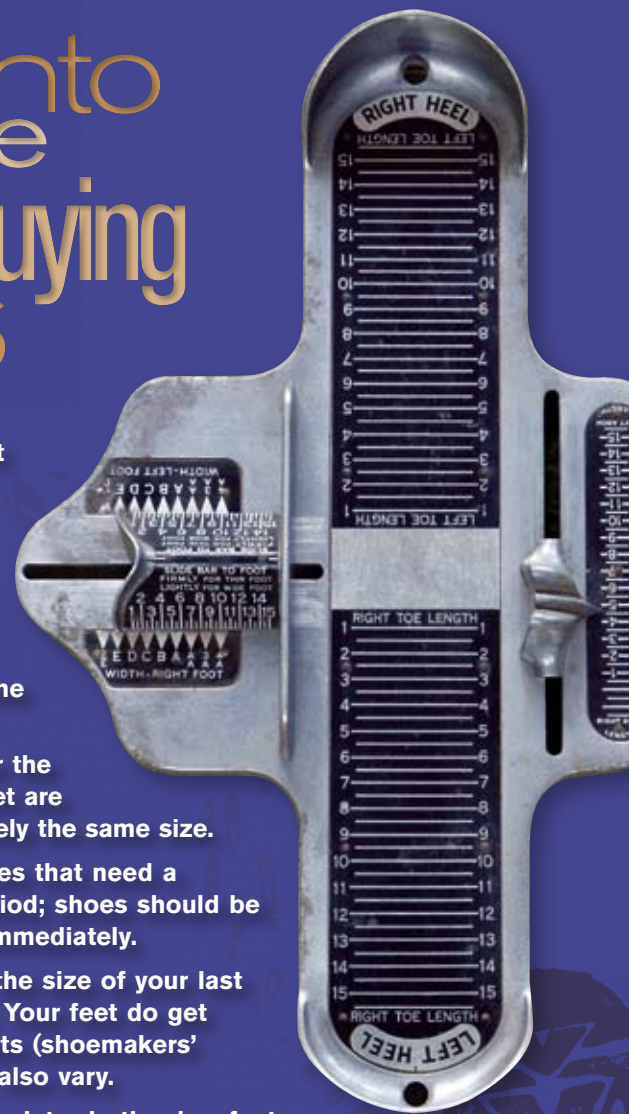
“I am happy now with my comfort and fashion both,” she said. “Bottom line is all of us that are on our feet all the time need to find what works best for us, ugly or not.”

Debra agreed that R.T.s should take better care of themselves and make foot comfort a priority.

“As caregivers, we often overlook ourselves to help others. Working on a concrete floor 40-plus hours a week will wear and tear on the bones and joints,” Debra said. “Wearing an ugly shoe is a small price to pay to keep them healthy.”

TAP Into Shoe Buying TIPS

- ▶ **Have your feet measured while you're standing.**
- ▶ **Always try on both shoes, and walk around the store.**
- ▶ **Always buy for the larger foot; feet are seldom precisely the same size.**
- ▶ **Don't buy shoes that need a “break-in” period; shoes should be comfortable immediately.**
- ▶ **Don't rely on the size of your last pair of shoes. Your feet do get larger, and lasts (shoemakers' sizing molds) also vary.**
- ▶ **Shop for shoes later in the day; feet tend to swell during the day, and it's best to be fitted while they are in that state.**
- ▶ **Be sure that shoes fit well — front, back and sides — to distribute weight. It sounds elementary, but be sure the widest part of your foot corresponds to the widest part of the shoe.**
- ▶ **Select a shoe with a leather upper, stiff heel counter, appropriate cushioning and flexibility at the ball of the foot.**
- ▶ **Buy shoes that don't pinch your toes, either at the tips or across the toe box.**
- ▶ **Try on shoes while you're wearing the same type of socks or stockings you expect to wear with the shoes.**
- ▶ **If you wear prescription orthotics — biomechanical inserts prescribed by a podiatric physician — you should take them along to shoe fittings.**



Courtesy of the American Podiatric Medical Association