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For More Information Contact:  
Kathleen Rooney Communications  
716-572-5854 (Mobile)

## **ARE YOUR FEET STOPPING YOU FROM GETTING FIT?**

As it happens every January, you can bet that millions of New Yorkers have made well-intended resolutions to eat better, exercise more and lose weight. But, if you are among the 72 percent of Americans who say they cannot exercise because of foot pain, those good intentions will never become reality. NOW is the time to take action and get help. The foot specialists of the New York State Podiatric Medical Association are using January as a springboard for educating the public as to the importance of foot health and safety when beginning an exercise program.

With rising obesity statistics also comes an increase in diabetes, heart disease and other related illnesses; exercising and maintaining a healthy weight are two preventative measures that require healthy feet. But the numbers show that Americans view their feet as the least important body part and yet the number one to experience pain! In spite of its prevalence, foot pain is not normal and should be treated by a specialist.

Podiatrists recommend that before beginning an exercise program, make sure your feet are fit, flexible and strong. And always consult with a physician before embarking on any new fitness regimen. Considering that a 120-pound person walking a single mile exerts the equivalent of approximately 63 tons, which is a force greater than 125,000 pounds on each foot, it's no wonder that foot injuries are so common among Americans.

According to Dr. Gary Stones, President of the New York State Podiatric Medical Association, there are simple strengthening exercises that can help prevent common foot injuries. "Feet bear the brunt of impact in any workout," said Dr. Stones. "By warming

up properly and cooling down with some massage techniques, you can avoid some of the most common foot pain associated with exercise.”

Here are some simple foot exercises that can be done at home or at the gym, before you work out:

**1. Toe Points** - While standing, do toe raises, toe points and toe curls. Hold each position for five seconds and repeat ten times. This is a perfect way to help alleviate toe cramps and strengthen calf muscles.

**2. Toe Squeezes** - Place a foam toe separator between your toes and squeeze for five seconds. Repeat ten times. This is a good strengthening exercise for people who suffer from hammertoes or toe cramps.

**3. The Roll** - Applying light pressure and rolling a golf ball under the ball of your foot for approximately two minutes creates an instant massage for the bottom of the foot. This exercise is perfect for people who suffer from plantar fasciitis (heel pain syndrome), cramps or arch pain (and it feels great!). If a golf ball is not readily available, any type of small ball will work just as well.

**4. Towel Scoop** - Place your gym towel on the floor and pick it up by only using your toes. Repeat this exercise five times. Try this if you have hammertoes, toe cramps, pain in the ball of your foot, or for overall strengthening.

### **Foot Massage Techniques**

A foot massage not only helps to release tension in your feet, but also increases circulation and maintains the health of the skin on your feet. The first step to a perfect foot massage is to be sure that you and your partner are sitting comfortably in separate chairs. If you are giving yourself a foot massage, simply lift your foot across your lap to begin.

Next, apply a generous amount of emollient-enriched skin lotion or Vitamin E cream to hydrate the skin. This not only moisturizes your foot, but also allows your hands to move

smoothly.

**1. Warm-Up** - To begin stimulating circulation and warming up your foot, hold the foot in your hands. Starting at the top of the foot, begin a long, slow stroking motion with your thumbs, from the tips of the toes, down your sole to your heel and up to your ankle. Retrace your strokes back to the toes and repeat 3-5 times or until the foot feels warm.

**2. Ankle Rotations** - To loosen the ankle joint and relax your feet, cup the foot under the back portion of the heel in order to brace the foot and leg. Grip the foot with the other hand and turn it slowly at the ankle five times in each direction.

**3. Toe Stretch** - Grasp the foot at the arch. With the other hand, starting with the big toe, hold the toe with your thumb and index finger and firmly pull the toe, slowly moving and squeezing your fingers up the sides of the toe. Repeat this movement twice on each toe.

**4. Arch Release** - To help release tension in your foot's arch, hold the heel of the foot and use the other hand to apply pressure. Slide the heel of your hand along the arch from the ball of the foot toward the base of the ankle and back up the sole of the foot. Repeat five times.

**5. Cool Down** - End your foot massage with the same technique used in the warm-up. Then, remove all excess lotion that may be left between your toes with soap and water and dry thoroughly.

For more information or to find a podiatrist in your area, visit [nyspma.org](http://nyspma.org) and click on the "Find a Podiatrist" button.

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*The New York State Podiatric Medical Association is the largest statewide component of the American Podiatric Medical Association and its affiliated national network of certifying boards and professional colleges. Established in 1895, NYSPMA has over 1,200 members across 13 divisions in New York State. Visit [www.nyspma.org](http://www.nyspma.org) for more information. The Association is located at 1255 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10029.*

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