

New York, NY - Whether it's a belt that promises to tone abs while watching TV or the thigh master, Americans can always be counted on to try the latest trends in workout equipment. While some fail to live up to their promises and fade out just as quickly as they made headlines, others gradually become classics. The latest to make waves in this category are shoes designed to improve physical fitness and, in some cases, help the wearer lose weight. Shoes have long enjoyed a prominent role in fashion - styles from Manolo Blahnik and Nike are considered iconic - but never before has their function been center stage.

"Shoes that claim to encourage and even contribute to weight loss, but require nothing more than walking, are all the rage and while some of those claims are valid, some are not," says board certified New York City podiatrist Dr. Johanna S. Youner. "It's a classic case of something that sounds too good to be true actually being too good to be true."

Navigating the various choices is an arduous task. Dr. Youner prides herself on being at the helm of cutting-edge technology and is a proponent of the philosophy of combining health and beauty. Even so, she warns that it's vital to consult a physician prior to taking part in any new fitness trend. Dr. Youner, along with partner Dr. Emanuel Sergi see countless patients at their Park Avenue practice Park Avenue Podiatric Associates invest in shoes that claim to promote fitness but instead of achieving greater health, they end up with new issues like tendonitis. "It's important to realize these shoes force the foot to actually function differently," explains Dr. Sergi. "New muscles are engaged in the foot and legs and if the patient doesn't use them correctly, they can actually do more harm than good."

The FitFlop™: "The Flip Flop with a Gym Built in"

- **The Claim:** The FitFlop is designed as an alternative for people who love wearing flip flops but require the support of a walking shoe. For people who spend a considerable amount of time on their feet, The Fit Flop provides them with comfort as well as a workout aimed at toning the calf, thigh and buttocks. Their web site (www.fitflops.com) states their goal "to create the world's most efficient dual-use fashion/fitness products" but they warn that since FitFlops have the potential to increase muscle activity in both duration and workload, they should be used progressively to avoid "excessive muscle soreness."

- **What the Doctor Says:** In Dr. Sergi's expert opinion, there are some benefits to wearing Fit Flops. In comparison to standard, flat-soled rubber flip flops, they are an improvement because the thick sole offers increased shock absorption. But, says Dr. Sergi, keep in mind that despite their solid construction, they are still flip flops. "Feet work harder with all flip flops just to keep them on, increasing the occurrence of tendonitis and other injuries," cautions Dr. Sergi. "Also, an open toe in any situation often leads to injuries especially when they're worn for outdoor chores or while rushing through crowds." Finally, he says that those who suffer from heel pain should never use Fit Flops - plantar fasciitis is a serious threat because the way the Fit Flop bends pulls on the plantar fascia, which connects the heel to the toes, and can lead to uncomfortable inflammation.

MBT: "The Anti Shoe"

- **The Claim:** MBT, or Masai Barefoot Technology, claims to mimic uneven terrain thanks to their signature rolling sole, effectively transforming the cement, asphalt and tile surfaces people primarily walk on throughout the day into the natural surfaces that make hiking and trail-walking so physically beneficial. The idea is that by forcing muscles to work harder, they revert to their natural function of absorbing shock to protect joints and improve balance. The wearer gradually gains better posture and a more toned physique.

- **What the Doctor Says:** Dr. Youner says that MBTs offer a way to improve certain conditions such as heel pain, plantar fasciitis and bunions but can alternately cause tendonitis. "If you overwear them, they will cause tendonitis, there are no two ways about it," explains Dr. Youner, adding that many people misunderstand the use of MBTs. "Similar to custom arch supports, the user undergoes an adjustment period where they gradually increase the amount of time they wear MBTs beginning with half an hour per day. That undermines the appeal of a weight loss program that requires no additional effort on the user's part."

Orthotebb Health Shoes: "You've Never Felt Better!"

- **The Claim:** Orthotebb Health Shoes were invented by a physician to offer relief from pain caused by footwear while simultaneously providing the benefits of a calorie-burning workout akin to climbing stairs. They boast the ability to trim and tone legs, hips, abs, buttocks, and love handles; lessen the pain of plantar fasciitis; improve posture and back pain; improve circulation and burn calories to lose weight. Like MBTs, they feature a rocker sole that places the center of gravity forward.

● **What the Doctor Says:** Drs. Youner and Sergi actually prescribe Orthotebb Health Shoes to patients, but not for weight loss. "These shoes are very helpful for patients with severe arthritis, plantar fasciitis and heel pain. They are to be used by those with foot problems, not the general public," advises Dr. Youner, adding that any shoe lower in the heel than it is in the forefoot risks overstretching the Achilles tendon, which frequently leads to tendonitis.

Arcopedico Health Shoe: "The Most Comfortable Shoes on Earth"

● **The Claim:** Arcopedico shoes emphasize their ability to go extra easy on tired, overworked feet that need a break. Different from standard shoes where the total weight of the body rests on about three points, the foot rests on the entire surface area of the Arcopedico insole resulting in less tiring of the foot arch and the elimination of blisters, calluses and curvature of the big toe. Additionally, they exercise the foot, strengthen the muscles, assist the healthy circulation and ensure comfort while walking. Arcopedico shoes feature a handmade upper fashioned from a breathable weave of fiber thread and molded PVC soles ergonomically designed to maintain cushioned walking with perfect posture.

● **What the Doctor Says:** According to Dr. Youner, Arcopedico's uppers offer no support. "They are good for people doing chores around the house since their function is comparable to a slipper," says Dr. Youner. She added that since Arcopedicos lack a rigid heel counter, they are unable to control a person's foot and should not be worn for hurried or long distance walks.

Patients often ask about the pros and cons of wearing popular shoes that promise a better physique or a healthier lifestyle. Dr. Youner's best advice is that the most important thing is to understand completely how they are supposed to be used - often people don't recognize the part they should be playing. Dr. Sergi agrees "There is no shortcut to achieving a healthy lifestyle, no matter what route a person chooses, it's going to take some work," he explains. "Many of the shoes at the heart of this trend actually do offer some benefits, but when used incorrectly the wearer can wind up with more problems than she started out with." Instead, they suggest people who would like to improve their health, but aren't sure about investing in a new pair of shoes, wear supportive sneakers they already own and work to take 10,000 steps a day.

About Park Avenue Podiatric Associates:

Dr. Johanna Youner, DPM, FACFAS and her partner Dr. Emanuel Sergi, DPM are cutting edge foot care specialists who take an aesthetic approach to curing all foot related ailments. For more information, please visit www.healthyfeetny.com.

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