

By DR. JOHN PERRY

**M**ore than 7,000 yards of greens, tees, fair ways and slopes coupled with mowing, fertilizing, bending, walking and lifting. These are the things superintendents and their crews have to deal with every day.

What they often don't pay attention to, however, is their bodies, joints, muscles and ligaments. Just as the

## Foot Dr.: Healthy feet make healthy greens

agri-management of soils, chemicals and water must be planned, measured and monitored, so too should the superintendent's biomechanics, shoe gear and work habits.

Overuse, repetitive motion and improper shoe gear are the primary causes of lower-extremity injuries.

Injuries fall into two categories. The first, acute trauma or accidents, makes up 20 percent. The second, repetitive trauma or 'overuse', is much more common at 80 percent. Prevention of these injuries can result in huge savings in terms of time and rehabilitation expenses.

One pair of boots or sneakers,

replaced regularly, can help avoid arch pain. Proper forefoot fit can prevent morton's neuroma, a pinched nerve in the toe area.

Regular behavior changes, like changing socks and shoes at lunch time, can reduce the chances of getting athletes feet. This tip can be especially helpful with the double whammy of

morning dew and automatic sprinklers.

Superintendents frequently ask "Hey, doc, what shoe should I wear?" The answer is "It depends."

A 200-pound person with high arches needs more cushioning and less support. A 150-pounder with flat feet needs more support with a rigid heel counter and less flexibility in the sole.

Regardless of the individual's dimensions, all golf course footwear should have the following:

- rigid heel counter;
- roomy toebox;
- firm outer sole, at least an inch thick that flexes only at the ball;
- breathable upper material.

I don't recommend particular brands because shoe styles change too frequently.

Shoes should be changed every day to dry out and replaced every three months. It may seem expensive, but will result in cost savings by reducing lost time and injuries.

"But I'm doing those things, doc, and still have pain," patients sometimes persist.

Don't despair.

If it's ankle, knee, hip or back pain, there could be a simple solution. It begins with a thorough physical exam and medical history. Then, using computer gait analysis, a diagnosis is made.

On the golf course, if the soil is too acidic, then growing problems occur. In lower-extremity biomechanics, when the leg and foot roll in excessively (over pronates) the ligaments are stressed excessively, causing shin splints, knee bursitis and/or low back pain.

The solution? Foot supports, commonly known as orthotics or arch cushions. The over-the-counter variety are an inexpensive first step, but often aren't overly effective.

If fatigue and pain persist, custom-made orthotics may be the answer. They can be soft, semi-rigid or rigid, depending on the individual's needs. They fit directly into the shoe, where they better control abnormal pronation motion and any resulting pain.

Just as good soil conditions cause grass to flourish, good mechanics result in reduced stress and fatigue. That makes for fewer injuries and a happier grounds crew.

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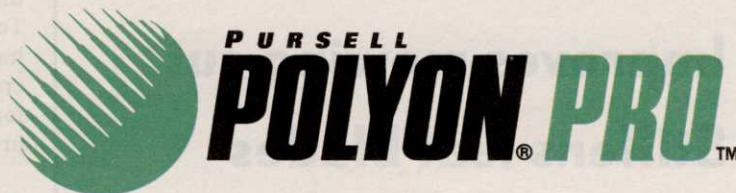


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