

Myths and Truths of New 'Toning' Shoes: Do They Work?

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Sarah Pritts, MD

(PhysOrg.com) -- Recently, there has been an increase in fitness shoes and sandals that promise—simply by wearing them—to sculpt and mold problem areas. But UC Health physicians say the promises may be a little steep.

The upbeat commercials that show women's toned legs dancing around the house and walking along the beach may make one consider running out to purchase the [shoes](#) that assume responsibility for those athletic builds on the TV screen.

Recently, there has been an increase in fitness shoes and sandals that promise—simply by wearing them—to sculpt and mold problem areas.

But UC Health physicians say the promises may be a little steep.

"I believe that these shoes could strengthen muscles and improve [posture](#), but they are not a miracle fitness breakthrough," says Sarah Pritts, MD, a physician in the department of family and community medicine.

"Other than studies from the shoes' manufacturing companies, there have been no reports showing that these shoes increase weight loss or calorie burn."

Pritts says the idea behind the shoes—particularly those with rounded, or "rocker" soles, to help the foot "rock" forward—originated as a form of [physical therapy](#) for ankle injuries.

"They help increase strength in the muscles surrounding the ankle," she says. "Most of these shoes are meant to cause instability, which forces wearers to use their muscles to maintain balance. Some of the shoes recreate what it's like to walk in sand—helping to work core muscles."

She says that as long as individuals don't have a gait/balance problem or an existing injury, these shoes are safe and could help in toning muscles.

However, she adds that just because one purchases these shoes does not mean he or she can cancel a gym membership.

"Walking, alone, is a great core cardio program, but it's no replacement for strength training," she says. "Don't think that you're getting the whole fitness package by walking in these shoes."

Pritts says people should only wear the shoes for short periods of time at first to build up strength.

"These are not shoes you can wear in your everyday life, at least in the beginning," she says. "I'd recommend starting with 15 minutes at a time and then build to 30-minute intervals. Eventually, you may be able to wear them as you would a regular pair of tennis shoes."

She adds that women who wear heels should be extra careful when slipping on these shoes and taking a long walk.

"These shoes stretch your Achilles tendon," she says. "When wearing high heels, the heel is always higher than the toe, shortening the range of motion of the tendon. These tennis shoes put your Achilles through a larger range of motion, which could lead to a tendon rupture or tear."

In any case, Pritts says to consult a physician or physical therapist if questions arise about the safety or benefits of these sorts of fitness shoes.

"Most importantly, incorporate good health practices in every area of your life," she says. "There isn't a quick fix for living a healthy lifestyle. Eat right, exercise—including cardio and strength training—at least 30 minutes a day and avoid overuse of alcohol and tobacco to help ensure the healthiest you."

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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