



# FLAT FEET FOR HEALTH

Jon Burras

Human beings have been standing upright and walking on two feet for thousands, or perhaps, even millions of years. Placing one foot in front of the other to propel us around has been a large part of our evolution. Walking and standing have always been normal and natural. We hunted, foraged, cared for our young, and warded off threatening beasts, for the most part supported by our feet.

As we moved out of caves and teepees and into our homes and cities a dramatic shift has taken place. Most people in the industrialized world find themselves no longer burdened by trying to survive. Instead, they often use their bodies to reflect a more unnatural desire. They are now more concerned with how they look than their ability to survive. Through this change in priorities, we have somehow managed to distort something that used to be as natural as walking and standing.

In a natural world the foot is designed in a way to support us in many of our upright endeavors. Whether it is walking, standing, running, or climbing, the foot is designed by nature to be able to adapt to the many different stresses being applied to it. With the development of shoes and fashion, this natural ability has become lost. We are now more concerned about the shape of our body rather than its function.

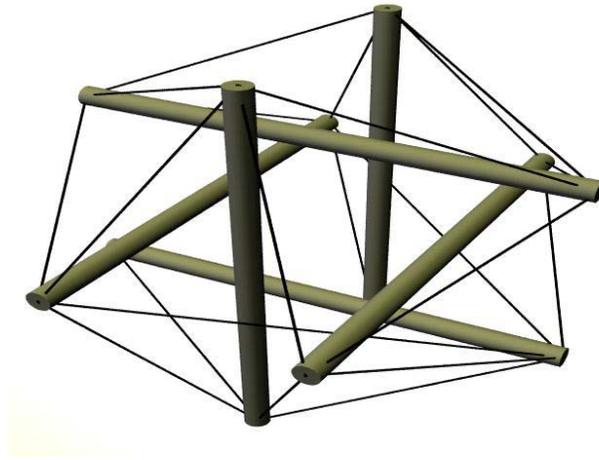
Because of these influences our beliefs about our feet have become very unnatural. The fashion industry and others whose economic interests are at stake proclaim that an arched foot is both normal and functional. In fact, these are both myths. The truth of the matter is that the healthiest foot is a flat foot.

## **Anatomy of the Foot**

The foot is designed in a way to support not only our standing upright but a host of other activities. The bottom of the human foot has three primary arches. These are the medial longitudinal arch, the lateral longitudinal arch, and the transverse arch. Together these three arches create a spring or shock absorption system that helps to support any impact. The muscles on the bottom of the foot will flatten out and lengthen when one stands upright and pressure is applied to the foot.

The foot is designed like a tensegrity model. A tensegrity model is a series of cables and pulleys that push and pull the entire structure in a way to maintain balance. As one cable pulls on one side a cable on the opposite side of this structure will have to loosen to help maintain this balance. In this way the integrity of the structure is maintained by the tensional pull of the cables.

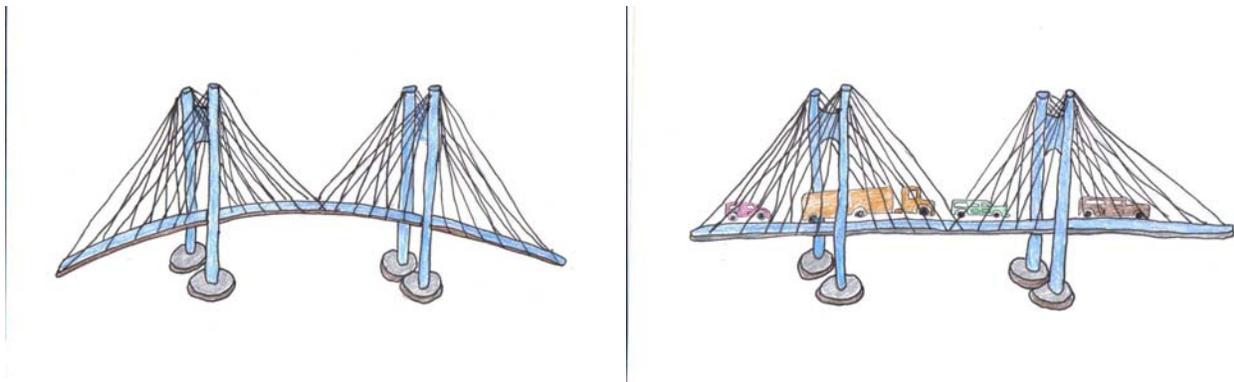
When the foot is balanced there is a lengthening and flattening of the foot when standing. An unbalanced foot will arch. After all, if the muscles of the foot help to create this cable system, why would you want tight cables in the form of tight muscles? An arched foot is a series of tight muscles in the foot. Most people would agree that a tight back muscle is a bad thing. Why are tight feet muscles considered a good thing in the form of an arch?



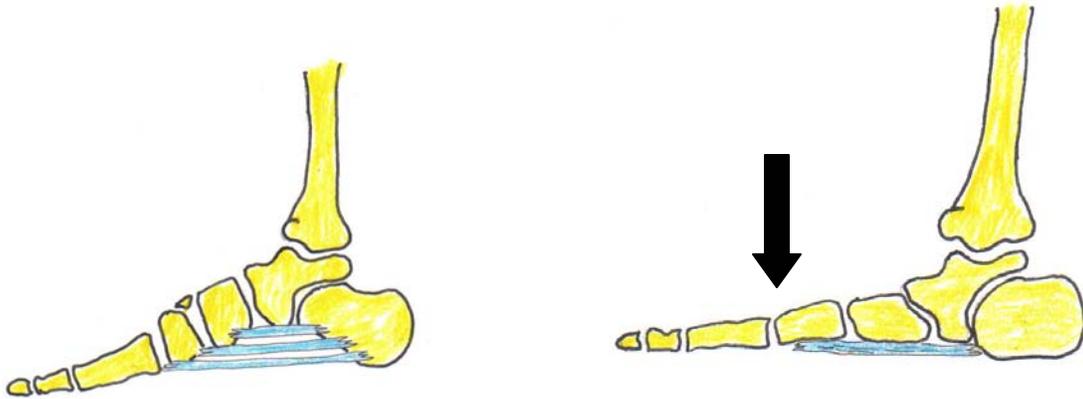
### **Tensegrity Model**

The foot being a tensegrity model is much like a suspension bridge. The cables of the bridge hold the roadway up, not the columns themselves. As weight is applied to the bridge an arched bridge will begin to flatten out. The more weight that is applied the flatter the roadway of the bridge becomes. Traffic crossing over the bridge causes the bridge to begin to flatten. The heavier the traffic the flatter the roadway becomes.

In a similar manner, when we stand upright any arch in the bottoms of our feet should naturally flatten out. Gravity pressing down creates enough force to stretch the cables on the bottoms of the feet. The muscles act like the cables of a suspension bridge. You might even say that the bones of the feet are actually floating within a network of cable structures called muscles.



**Weight Applied to a Suspension Bridge Will Flatten Out the Roadway**



### **Pressure Applied When Standing Will Naturally Flatten the Foot**

#### **The Curse of Shoes**

Shoes were created in the course of our evolution as a means of protecting our feet from the elements of nature. Sharp jagged rocks and icy storms that could play havoc with our feet are warded off by wearing shoes. While crossing a blistering hot desert shoes provide protection to the wandering nomad. Shoes have been an invaluable tool to help us survive.

Much has changed since many of us have left our natural origins and ventured into the cities. For most, the shoe has lost its functional value and now is more inclined to represent a statement of fashion. Appearing a certain way has surpassed the need to protect our feet. As this transformation has occurred we have lost the true intention of our feet. Most feet have become misshapen to reflect a cultural norm.

The modern shoe has an arch about midway through the foot. This arch will actually lift up the foot when standing, which is just the opposite of what nature is trying to do. Instead of lengthening the muscles on the bottom of the foot when standing most shoes will tighten up the muscles in the foot to facilitate this bulging in the shoe. As this happens day in and day out the foot becomes permanently tightened and distorted. The tighter the muscles in the bottom of the foot the higher the arch will generally be found.

Shoe manufacturers, podiatrists, fashion designers, and even most mainstream Western medical practitioners commonly believe in the need to create a foot with an arch. Does this sound like scientific quackery at its best? Does this remind you of the days when medical doctors were recommending that their patients smoke more cigarettes to calm them down to ward off a host of ailments, like asthma and heart disease? Does this sound like an urban legend that most believe to be true but nobody knows where it came from or even questions its validity?



Shoes come in many shapes and sizes. The common grain that pulls most of them together is that they all were developed on the myth that the foot needs to have an arch. While some types of shoes distort the foot more than others, (like high heels or pointed cowboy boots), the fact remains the same. Shoes create an imbalance in the foot by means of an unnatural arch.

Many of the problems that people experience from their feet originate from the wearing of shoes. Corns, calluses, and plantar fasciitis are some of these common ailments caused by the shoes that are worn. Instead of blaming genetics or bad luck you may want to look at your shoes.

We place our children in shoes early on, even before they begin to walk. Has anyone ever stopped to question this practice? Look at how the shoe industry and the fashion empire have helped to shape our own beliefs about our feet. Notice how corporate money often tends to move us away from our natural origins.

### **Myths and Mythological Treatments**

There is quite a bit of stigma that comes with having flat feet. The military has traditionally excused men and women from armed service if they have flat feet. It is “believed” that flat feet prevent these soldiers from marching in boots. There is very little validity to this belief. Many doctors today treat flat feet as if it were a disease. They prescribe all sorts of inserts to try to create this unnatural arch. A flat foot is labeled as a “fallen arch”, as if you are defective.

A booming business is the industry of arch supports and heel inserts. This common practice proclaims that if your feet are already distorted and painful let’s keep them in a distorted shape by placing a cushion in the shoe to anchor the imbalance in place. Inserts do not cure one from foot imbalances. An insert acts like a cast to keep the problem where it is or even makes it worse over time.

Inserts placed in shoes are not unlike the eye care industry. Eye glasses prescribed for vision difficulties do not cure the eye of these difficulties. Eye glasses only keep the vision locked in place or make it worse over time. Heel inserts and arch supports in the shoes do the same thing.

Imagine taking a wooden board and duct taping it to the center of your forehead with a considerable amount of pressure, *and leaving it there for several years*. When you finally remove the tape and the board you will notice that your forehead is now in an entirely different shape, (in this case much flatter). This common practice was utilized by many Native American tribes on their young children for generations. The hope was that a flatter forehead was more akin to royalty. What we do to alter the shape of our feet is very similar.

Corrective shoes are also common medical tools that are used to misshape the foot. The belief is that by casting the foot and leg in a brace for several months or years the problem will be corrected. Unfortunately, this practice often leads to complications further down the road.

Distorting the foot is not a new practice. This has been going on for a very long time. An ancient Chinese tradition was to bind the feet of young women. This kept them deformed and powerless. High heels in our modern era speak the same message. These elongated shoes distort a woman’s body in order to reflect a cultural model of appearing as a sex object. Both of these practices were developed by men and used on women.

### **The Feet Affect the Rest of the Body**

What happens in the bottoms of the feet often reflects to other areas of the body. In the ancient system of Reflexology it is believed that by stimulating various points in the bottom of the foot one can help to heal other areas of the body. For instance, gentle thumb pressure to the big toe is said to take away headaches. Pressure applied to the heel will help in the balancing of the intestinal tract.

Unfortunately, this belief also works in reverse. Tight muscles in the bottoms of the feet caused by shoes and arches can also create imbalances in other areas of the body. An arch support will create a tension pattern in the foot that will be reflected up the body into another area, perhaps into an organ or a gland.

The bottoms of the feet are also important to keep the rest of the body balanced. The musculature and the connective tissue of the body begin in the bottoms of the feet and travel up to the top of the head. This is like a full body sweater. When you tighten up one end the other end will tighten up as well.

Tension created in the bottoms of the feet in the form of an arch will be reflected up the back of the leg, into the knee, and up towards the lower back. From here that same tension travels up the back and into the shoulders, coming to rest across the top of the head. Tension in the bottoms of the feet from shoes with arches may be responsible for your knee pain, backache, or even a migraine head ache. Only when the feet flatten out will much of this body tension be eliminated.



**An Arched Foot Tightens the Muscles and Connective Tissue leading up the Body**

Indigenous people who live close to nature seldom wear shoes, and if they do it is usually a light sandal without a heel and with little or no arch support. These people also do not suffer from the same back pain that Westerners do, who are implanted in their arched shoes all day long. If we could learn anything from the natural world it is that an arched foot is a detriment to one's health. How many animals in nature feel the need for shoes? After all, they are perfectly designed to adapt to their natural surroundings. Those people who wear shoes infrequently will be much more balanced than those who artificially manipulate their bodies for fashion reasons.

The feet are an intricate reflection of your overall health. When you begin to pay as much attention to your feet as you do to your skin complexion or hair style then you have come to honor your feet. Until then, unconsciousness will only lead to other problems. Step out of the world of vanity and myth and walk back into the world as nature intended.

### **Solutions**

1. Go barefoot often

A foot that contacts the solid earth with each step is massaged into flattening out. This foot has the ability to adapt to the changing terrain, whether it is climbing uphill or striding along a flat path.

2. Wear flat shoes

If you do find yourself wearing shoes often find a pair that has little or no heel and the lowest form of arch within the shoe itself. Wear sandals if possible.

3. Take out arch or heel supports

Arch or heel supports will not cure whatever problem is in your foot. In fact, these inserts will either keep your feet exactly the same or even make them worse over time. They could even help to create further imbalances in the rest of the body as the tension from the foot is reflected up to other areas.

4. Massage the feet

A foot massage is a wonderful place to start to help relieve any tension in the foot. From Reflexology to Swedish massage there are many techniques that could help the feet.

5. Practice Yoga

Yoga is an ancient system that incorporates expansive movements to balance and lengthen many areas of the body. The foot is no exception. With regular yoga practice you will see the areas of tension in the feet begin to disappear.