

How do we convince our Dad to upgrade his shoe size? His feet

Q: Dad continues to complain everyday about how his feet hurt. And when I took a look at his shoes -- no wonder! He's shoving his very wide feet into a size 8 and he hasn't been a size 8 since Nixon was in office. How do we convince him to ""upgrade"" so-to-speak?

A: You have uncovered a very well-kept secret among our older adults. Studies show that as we get older, our feet tend to shrink and get wider. But shoe manufacturers have not altered shoes to accommodate for this change. And many people continue to wear the same size they have always worn putting up with the discomfort of a too-small or too-tight shoe rather than admitting they need a larger size.

Depending on the type of shoe your father prefers, the shoes may be too narrow just based on style. But he's not alone. A review of studies published on foot pain showed that more than 50 per cent of adults aged 50 or older complain of foot pain. Women tend to have more problems in this area than men because of years in "fashion footwear" (high heels, narrow toes).

What can be done to help your father? Perhaps encouraging him to see his primary care physician or even a specialist podiatrist would help. Sometimes when the "white coat" is speaking, older adults listen (at least more than they appear to be listening to their children).

Going shopping together might be helpful. We've noticed more and more shoe stores where the attendant actually measures the foot for an accurate shoe size. This is something that was done back in the 1950s and 60s but seemed to go out of practice recently. Of course, they also had X-ray machines in shoe stores back then, too. X-rays gave a really accurate foot size reading, but the dangers of exposure to radiation were verified, this practice ended for good.

You might even want to pre-scout out shoe stores where the service is good and measurements are taken. Direct your dad there first. Even if he doesn't end up with shoes at that store, he may have a new mind set toward a larger size. Given how difficult foot pain can be, just experiencing the comfort of a larger shoe may be enough to sell your father on a properly fitting shoe. In the end, you will be doing him a good service. Good luck!

Reference: Martin J. Thomas, et al. The Population Prevalence of Foot and Ankle Pain in Middle and Old Age: A Systematic Review. In PAIN. December 2011. Vol. 152. No. 12. Pp. 2870-2880.