

SAN FRANCISCO HEALTHCARE

Crucial Care for Expecting Moms

Preventing permanent changes by protecting the feet and ankles during pregnancy is crucial, says award-winning podiatrist **Dr. Mark Co, DPM, MS Engineering**.

Every expectant mother can speak to how drastically her body changes during pregnancy, but the feet often get overlooked,” says trusted San Francisco-based podiatrist Dr. Mark Co, DPM, MS Engineering.

During pregnancy, the body produces higher levels of relaxin, a hormone that relaxes and loosens ligaments and connective tissue in the pelvis to facilitate the baby’s delivery. However, the effects of relaxin aren’t limited to the pelvic region. The hormone impacts other joints as it circulates throughout the body, causing increased flexibility known as ligamentous laxity in the hips, knees, ankles, and feet.

“While ligamentous laxity during pregnancy is normal, many women experience pain and discomfort as a result,” says Dr. Co. Fortunately, these symptoms can be alleviated with small lifestyle changes and sturdy foot or ankle support that may prevent permanent changes, including flattening of the feet.

“Primary care physicians refer to diet, exercise, and sleep as the tripod of good health,” he continues. “Similarly, stretching, sturdy shoes, and orthotics are the tripod of excellent foot health.”

A top-ranked podiatrist and leading sports medicine provider, Dr. Co knows preventative care is critical to foot and ankle health. Deeply dedicated to education, he helps patients understand their underlying conditions and treatment options so they can actively participate in their care.

“I leverage my mechanical knowledge to better understand the physics and biomechanics behind why pain ensues,” says Dr. Co, a former engineer turned podiatrist.

Best Foot Forward

Ligamentous laxity causes ligaments to become overly flexible, leading to flattening of the feet, a condition where the arches of the feet are lower than normal or absent. “As the arch drops, compensation tightens the calf muscle, creating pain throughout the foot and ankle,” Dr. Co explains. “Therefore, caring for the calves has a tremendous effect on the feet, especially for pregnant women.”

That’s why Dr. Co recommends stretching calf muscles and engaging in low-impact exercises that promote muscle strength and stability. But conditioning is just one piece of the equation, he warns.

“It’s crucial for pregnant women to take appropriate measures to protect their

ligaments and joints. As a podiatrist, I help patients preserve the structure of their feet with custom orthotics that better align the entire lower extremity to the ground,” he expands.

Beyond orthotics, sturdy shoes with a low, modest heel provide essential support that protects against sprains, strains, and other injuries—even at home.

“Wearing shoes or slippers prevents injury and reduces daily stress and discomfort while at home. I encourage all moms to invest in a pair of house slippers with some structure, similar to the structure an orthotic support provides,” says Dr. Co.

Ultimately, some women may experience only mild pain or discomfort from ligamentous laxity, but symptoms should never be overlooked.

“Always consult with a podiatrist or healthcare provider,” advises Dr. Co. “We’re here to ensure the well-being of both you and your baby.”



Dr. Mark Co, DPM, MS Engineering

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