

#### 14. Feet that are really painful to walk on



**What it means:** Undiagnosed stress fractures are a common cause of foot pain. The discomfort can be felt along the sides of the feet, in the soles, or "all over." These fractures -- they often occur repeatedly -- may be caused by another underlying problem, often osteopenia (a decrease in optimum bone density, especially in women over age 50) or some kind of malnutrition, including a vitamin D deficiency, a problem absorbing calcium, or anorexia.

**More clues:** Often you can still walk on the broken bones; it just hurts like heck. (Some hardy people have gone undiagnosed for as long as a year.)

**What to do:** See a foot doctor about any pain. If, for example, you've been walking around Europe for three weeks in bad shoes, your feet may simply be sore. But a 55-year-old sedentary woman with painful feet may need a bone-density exam. An X-ray can also reveal possible nutritional issues that warrant a referral to a primary care provider.