

Are Flip Flops and Sandals Causing Your Foot Pain This Summer?

Summer in Idaho Falls is something worth savoring. Long days, warm temperatures, outdoor concerts, weekend floats on the Snake River — it's the season everyone looks forward to. And when the heat finally arrives, people reach for their lightest, most minimal footwear without a second thought. Flip flops come out of the closet. Sandals replace sneakers. Bare soles hit sun-warmed pavement.

Here's the thing, though: we see a predictable spike in certain types of foot pain every single summer, and the timing lines up almost perfectly with when people make the switch to minimal footwear. We're not here to take away your summer sandals. But we do want to help you understand what's actually happening to your feet when you live in them — and what to do if they've already started making themselves known in the form of pain.

[Heel pain](#) is one of the most common summer complaints we treat at Idaho Foot & Ankle Center, and flip flops are one of the most common contributors. Let's talk about why.

What Flip Flops and Flat Sandals Actually Do to Your Feet

The appeal of flip flops is obvious: they're lightweight, easy, and perfect for summer activities. What they are not, however, is supportive. A standard flip flop provides a thin layer of cushioning between your foot and the ground — and that's about it. There's no heel counter, no arch support, no structural support of any kind. Your foot is essentially moving as if it's barefoot, but with a thong strap to keep the shoe on and a flat sole to separate you from the ground.

This matters because the average person takes thousands of steps per day. When each of those steps happens on a flat, unsupported surface, the foot has to work harder to maintain stability, propulsion, and balance. The arch flattens and absorbs more impact than it's designed to handle. The plantar fascia — already under load just from daily walking — stretches and strains with every step. The calf and Achilles complex work overtime to compensate for the lack of structured support.

Over a week or two of summer sandal wear, these stresses accumulate. Over an entire season, they can create real structural problems.

Plantar Fasciitis and the Summer Heel Pain Surge

Plantar fasciitis is the most common diagnosis behind heel pain, and it's a condition that absolutely spikes in summer. The shift from supportive footwear to flip flops changes the biomechanical environment the plantar fascia operates in, and for people who are already predisposed — those with flat feet, tight calf muscles, or a history of heel pain — that change is often enough to trigger a flare.

The symptoms are unmistakable once they set in: a sharp, stabbing pain in the heel with the first steps after rest, tenderness along the arch, and pain that worsens after prolonged activity. Left unaddressed, plantar fasciitis can become chronic and significantly harder to resolve. We treat it successfully with a

combination of custom orthotics, [MLS laser therapy](#), and targeted care that addresses both the inflammation and the underlying mechanical causes.

How Sandals Contribute to Arch Pain and Flat Feet Problems

For people with [flat feet](#) — a condition where the arch of the foot collapses under load — unsupportive summer footwear can significantly worsen symptoms. When there's no arch support present in the shoe, a flat foot has to work even harder, placing increased demand on the posterior tibial tendon (the structure most responsible for supporting the arch during movement).

Prolonged strain on that tendon is one of the leading causes of adult-acquired flatfoot deformity, a progressive condition where the arch continues to collapse over time. What begins as summer aching in the inner ankle and arch can, over years of inadequate support, develop into a structural change that eventually requires more significant intervention.

[Contact our support team to get more info](#) if you've been noticing persistent arch or ankle pain this summer. The sooner we assess what's driving it, the more options we have.

The Ankle Stability Problem

Flip flops and thin sandals don't just lack arch support — they also don't provide any lateral stability. Every step in a flip flop requires small, constant muscular corrections to keep the shoe on and maintain balance. On flat, smooth surfaces this isn't a major issue. On uneven terrain — grass, gravel, wood chip paths, slight curb lips — it creates a real risk of ankle rolling.

[Ankle sprains](#) in summer are significantly more common than in other seasons, in part because people are navigating variable terrain in footwear that offers them no protection. A sprained ankle that isn't properly evaluated and rehabilitated can lead to chronic instability that affects athletic performance and everyday function long after summer ends.

Neuromas, Calluses, and Other Sandal-Season Complaints

Sandal-season brings a handful of other foot issues we address regularly throughout the summer months.

[Neuromas](#) — painful thickened nerve tissue in the ball of the foot — can be aggravated by the lack of cushioning in flat sandals, which transfers more direct impact to the forefoot with every step. Patients who experience burning, tingling, or a sensation of "walking on a pebble" in the ball of the foot should have this evaluated promptly.

[Calluses and corns](#) are extremely common in summer. Open-back sandals and flip flops allow the foot to move around more inside the shoe, creating friction patterns that the skin responds to by thickening. While calluses provide some protection, painful ones signal that pressure distribution is off and should be addressed professionally — not scraped away at home.

Exposure is also a factor. Feet in sandals come into contact with more surfaces, which increases the risk of picking up plantar [warts](#) and [athlete's foot](#) from shared spaces like pool decks, locker rooms, and splash pads. Both conditions are highly treatable when caught early but tend to become more stubborn when left unmanaged.

What Makes a Summer Sandal Actually Foot-Friendly?

We're not anti-sandal. We're pro-healthy foot. And there's a meaningful difference between summer footwear that works with your feet and footwear that quietly works against them.

A sandal with a contoured footbed, structured arch support, and a firm midsole behaves very differently from a flat flip flop. Brands that build biomechanical support into their sandal designs — with raised arch contours and cushioned heel cups — can be genuinely appropriate for casual summer wear. They won't replace a proper athletic shoe for activity, but they're a far better option than a flat foam thong for everyday use.

That said, footwear guidance is most valuable when it's personalized. Our team can help you understand which types of sandals are appropriate for your foot structure, whether an over-the-counter insert might improve an otherwise unsupportive sandal, and when custom orthotics are worth investing in to protect your feet during an active summer.

Your Feet Work Hard All Summer — Make Sure They're Supported

Summer is meant to be enjoyed, and sore, aching feet have a way of putting a damper on everything. Whether you're navigating the Farmer's Market, spending a weekend at the reservoir, or chasing kids around the backyard, your feet deserve the support that keeps them functional and comfortable through all of it.

[New patients](#) are always welcome at Idaho Foot & Ankle Center. If summer sandal season has your feet talking back to you, let our Idaho Falls team listen — and help you get ahead of the problem before it takes over your summer.

Related Questions

Are there sandals that are actually good for foot health?

Yes — sandals with contoured arch support, cushioned heel cups, and a firm midsole are far better than flat flip flops. Our team can provide guidance specific to your foot type and activity level.

Can wearing flip flops every day cause permanent foot damage?

For most people, occasional flip flop use isn't harmful. Daily, prolonged wear — especially during active walking or on uneven terrain — can contribute to cumulative structural problems, particularly in people with flat feet or a history of heel pain.

Why do my feet hurt more in summer than any other time of year?

The seasonal shift to minimal footwear, combined with more outdoor activity, is a very common driver. Heat also causes feet to swell, which changes how shoes fit and can worsen pressure-related discomfort.

Is it safe to wear sandals if I have diabetes?

Diabetes significantly increases the risk of foot complications from even minor injuries. Open footwear exposes the feet to cuts, abrasions, and infection risk. Our diabetic foot care team can provide guidance on appropriate summer footwear for diabetic patients.