

## Healthy Feet: A Step in the Right Direction

The leg bone's connected to the ankle bone and ankle bone's connected to the foot bone ...but, what do we really know about the foot bone? Wear and tear on your feet starts when you first learn to walk and continues until you cannot walk anymore. We should all remember to pay close attention to our feet! They may be the first sign of problems in our bodies, including serious diseases.

Common conditions associated with your feet include:

- **Fungal and Bacterial Conditions:** Fungal and bacterial growth on your feet is caused by your foot being in a warm, dark, damp place; namely, your shoes. One of the most common fungal conditions is Athlete's Foot. Fungus and bacteria may cause dry skin, redness, blisters, itching and infection. To help prevent this condition, change shoes and socks often to help keep your feet dry. Also, try dusting your feet with foot powder to help dry moisture.
- **Corns and Calluses:** Friction and pressure are the main culprits for corns and calluses. When the bony parts of your feet rub against your shoes, hard, dry knots may form on your feet: Corns or calluses. Sometimes corns and calluses may be treated by wearing shoes that fit differently or cushioning the bony parts of your feet with special pads. Any form of treatment that involves cutting or scraping corns and calluses should only be performed by a health professional.
- **Bunions:** Your big toes may become swollen and tender as a result of joints in the toes not fitting together properly. If the bunion is not severe, you may be able to relieve pain and pressure by wearing shoes that are wider, taping your foot or wearing pads to cushion the bunion. Physical therapy, special shoe inserts or surgery may be necessary to treat the bunion. Unfortunately, bunions tend to run in families.
- **Hammertoe:** Shortening of the tendons that control toe movements is a condition known as hammertoe. The toe knuckle is usually enlarged, drawing the toe back. Over time, as the toe rubs against your shoes, it may become stiff and enlarge even more. Without your large toe resting against the walking surface, you may lose your balance. Treatment includes wearing socks and shoes with plenty of room for the toe so that it does not rub against the shoe. Surgery may be needed to correct hammertoe.
- **Spurs:** Calcium deposits on the bones of your feet may cause spurs – prickly rock-like formations that may cause great pain in your feet. Spurs are caused by muscle strain the feet from standing long periods of time or wearing ill-fitting shoes. Treatment for spurs includes using foot supports, heel pads and heel cups. In some cases, surgery may be necessary to remove spurs.

Certain people who have medical conditions should be especially concerned with the care of their feet. Diabetics and those with other nerve and circulatory disorders should be sure to practice diligent foot health to ensure that their feet are receiving proper blood flow and do not have any injuries. Cold feet may be a sign of circulation problems. Lack of blood flow to the feet

and toes is common for those with diabetes. Another sign of decreased blood flow is the loss of hair growth on the toes or feet. Decreased blood flow can make it difficult for people with diabetes to heal sores or infections.

If you suffer from diabetes you should check your feet every day. Look for areas of redness, areas of swelling or any other changes to the feet. Often, people with diabetes lose their sensation and cannot feel an abnormality on their foot so a daily inspection becomes very important. If you are older or unable to check your own feet, ask a friend or family member to help.

Keeping toenails trimmed is a very important task but may be dangerous for those with circulatory or nerve problems in their feet. Toenails should be trimmed straight across but no cut too short, especially in the corners. This may lead to ingrown toenails. Also, be careful when trimming that you do not cut the toe itself. Those with diabetes, circulation problems, nerve problems and those who are prone to infection should not cut their own toenails. Medicare will pay for toenail trimming by a trained medical professional if certain conditions are met, such as suffering from diabetes. Check with your health provider to see if you might qualify for this service.

Shoes that fit properly are paramount to good foot health. Remember the following:

- Foot size changes with age. Be sure to measure before each new shoe purchase.
- One foot is normally larger than the other so be sure to fit your new shoes to the larger foot.
- Make sure that the ball of your foot fits comfortably into the widest part of the shoe.
- Your heel should fit comfortably with little or no slipping when you walk.
- Most importantly, walk in the shoes before you buy them to make sure they do not hurt your feet.

Our feet do more work than a lot of other parts of the body. Remember to take care of your feet and remind your health provider to take a look at your feet the next time you go in for an appointment.

For more information you may contact the American Podiatric Medical Association at 1.800.FOOTCARE (1.800.366.8223) or on the internet at <http://www.apma.org>

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