

FOOT HEALTH WEEK

15 – 21 OCTOBER 2018

Foot Health Fact Sheet

LOOKING AFTER AGEING FEET

Did you know?

Foot pain affects
one in four older
people, with forefoot
pain affecting
two-thirds.

Ageing is a fact of life. After your feet have carried you millions of kilometres through your life, they can eventually wear down. But there are ways to keep your feet healthy as you age – through proper maintenance, care and regular check-ups.

What happens to feet as they age?

As you age, you can lose cushioning and soft tissue fat in the pads of your heels and balls of your feet, near your toes. Like the skin on your face, there is also a loss of elasticity in the skin on your feet, making it thin and vulnerable.

Bone deformities – such as bunions or arthritis – and difficulties undertaking basic foot care, can lead to foot health issues and sometimes an increased risk of falls – which for many can have drastic consequences.

Nails also become more brittle, thicker and harder, making them difficult to trim and prone to ingrown toenails, fungal breakouts and other infections.

Can foot problems be improved?

For older people, most foot problems can be improved by regular maintenance and care, keeping weight down, shoe modification and use of cushioned insoles.

To undertake regular foot maintenance, some elderly people have difficulty reaching their feet or have bad eyesight, so simple things like cutting toenails can be an issue – if this is the case get a family member to help or go and see a podiatrist. If you can cut your toenails yourself, make sure you trim them just short of the end of the toe, using a strong pair of nail clippers. After clipping, smooth the nails with a file or emery board, using downward strokes. It is also important to have your feet measured frequently as the bones in your feet change with age, this way you can ensure you choose shoes that fit well and are comfortable.

Taking good care of your feet as you age is good for your foot health as it helps you stay active and mobile.

When should you see a podiatrist?

Your feet are mirrors of your health. Warning signs of health conditions can be dry skin, brittle nails, burning and tingling sensations in your feet, or feelings of cold, numbness, and discolouration. If these occur, see a podiatrist, as they, along with your GP, will be able to pinpoint the cause.

Regular check-ups with your podiatrist are recommended, especially if you cannot look after your feet yourself and you have no one to help you. Nails that grow too long can become infected and if you are diabetic – which has a higher risk factor as we age – infection can lead to more serious illness.



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CORNS AND CALLUSES

Did you know?

Calluses and corns may be early warning signs of more complex foot disorders.

Corns and calluses are common skin conditions of the feet that can be easily treated, but good foot care and properly fitted shoes can prevent them developing.

How do corns and calluses develop?

Given your feet carry your body weight, footwear can make this more challenging if it creates extra friction on areas of your foot. When this happens, your body responds by thickening the surface layer of the skin. These hard patches of skin are called calluses, and if the pressure is concentrated in a small area, a hard corn may develop.

If not relieved, pressure may produce inflammation resulting in pain, swelling and redness. 'Soft' corns can also form between the toes, where skin is moist from sweat or inadequate drying. These appear white and rubbery and are also caused by excessive friction or pressure. Corns and calluses are most often found on the balls of the feet or the tops of the toes, as well as on the heels and along the sides of toenails.

Everyone can get them, especially the elderly, who lose fatty tissue and flexibility with age, and those who work in occupations that keep them on their feet.

What are the causes?

Calluses and corns can be signs of underlying problems and early warnings of more complex foot disorders. They can also indicate abnormalities or deformity in bone structure, and be caused by ill-fitting or inappropriate footwear. Overall, they are part of the body's defence system to protect tissue.

What are the treatment options?

Because calluses are generally symptoms of other problems, it is important to have a podiatrist examine your feet and biomechanics to work out the cause.

Over-the-counter remedies, such as corn paint or plasters, tend to treat the symptoms, not the underlying problem.

To treat your corn or callus, your podiatrist will gently remove some of the hard skin of the callus or corn, so that the centre can be removed. To allow for healing and to prevent future cases they may redistribute pressure on the foot with soft padding and strapping or deflective appliances that fit into your shoes (orthoses). Your podiatrist may also discuss your footwear and how all these options can reduce excessive weight-bearing forces on the foot and provide long-term relief.

Can you prevent corns and calluses?

Yes you can! Pay attention to your feet, keep them moisturised and ensure you have properly fitted shoes – especially if you spend a lot of time on your feet or you are elderly.



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DIABETES & YOUR FEET

Did you know...

Every day, 280
Australians develop
diabetes? That equals
around one person
every five minutes!

Have you wondered about the connection between diabetes and your feet? Here is what you need to know about your feet and diabetes – and why it is so important to look after your health.

How does diabetes affect feet?

Having diabetes may increase your risk of developing diabetes related-complications that include nerve damage called 'peripheral neuropathy' or poor circulation in your feet called 'peripheral vascular disease'.

Nerve damage may affect how you feel pressure or pain and may lead to numbness in your toes or feet. Changes to your circulation may delay your ability to heal any cuts or sores. This may also increase your risk of developing ulcers that may even lead to amputations.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Feet are often the first place to show such diabetic-related symptoms. This is why it is so important to pay attention to any such changes in your feet if you have diabetes.

Do you have cold feet, numbness, a sharp pain in your leg after walking, pins and needles, or any changes in foot colour, such as redder skin? Also look for any nail changes, corns, calluses, cracked or dry skin. Seek urgent care if you have any signs of an infection, or your skin starts to breakdown – such as via an ulcer or a crack in your heels. Or if you have a new pain, swelling or redness in this area. This is even more important if you have already been diagnosed with nerve damage.

What can you do?

- Make sure your feet are clean and dry, including drying between your toes
- Moisturise your feet every day
- Check your feet every day for changes
- Keep your toenails trimmed
- See your podiatrist regularly – and if you notice any changes to your feet, it is strongly recommended that you seek professional advice from a podiatrist.

How else can you look after your feet?

To prevent future foot problems, try and keep your blood glucose levels in your target range, avoid smoking, and keep physically active. Also, keep up-to-date with your annual cycle of care visits.

By taking the right steps in looking after your diabetes, these complications can be delayed or prevented altogether. For more information call the NDSS Helpline on 1300 136 588 to speak to a health professional.

Thanks to Diabetes NSW for assistance in compiling this fact sheet.



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FOOTWEAR HEALTH CHECK

Did you know...

Your feet house a quarter of the bones in your entire body?

This is why it is so important to ensure your shoes fit properly!

Ready to buy some new shoes? Carry out these five steps first, to ensure your feet stay healthy and well-protected.

Step 1: Push

Want to see how much support your shoes provide? Push the back ends of your shoes inwards.

If the back end stays firm, the heel counter is robust and will provide significant support to your feet. If the back end bends inwards, the heel counter is flexible. This means you either have a light-weight training shoe meant for activities that don't require support, or you may need to re-think your footwear purchase!

Step 2: Bend

Want to check your shoe is flexible where it counts? Bend it where your toes will go.

Your foot naturally bends and flexes at your metatarsal joints, located just behind your toes. Having a shoe that bends with your feet is important not only for comfort, but also for facilitating training routines. The more flexible and elastic your shoe is where the metatarsal joints bend, the greater your ability to activate and act on the muscles in your foot.

Step 3: Twist

Want to make sure your foot is supported during physical activities? Ensure the middle section of your shoe can't twist.

You should not be able to twist your shoes through the middle, instead it should remain stable and firm. This is essential for supporting your foot arch, and when bearing the weight of your body.

Step 4: Tie

Want to make sure your feet are firmly secured in your shoes? Tying laces can help!

If you don't want to use laces, then buckles or velcro can achieve the same result. By securing your feet, it helps to keep your toes from jamming into the front end of your shoes – and it increases support, which can help relieve pain in your feet.

Step 5: The rule of thumb

Want to ensure your shoes fit correctly? Look no further than your thumb!

You should leave about one thumb-width (1.5cm) of space between the tip of your longest toe and the front end of the shoe you are fitting for. This is because as you move, your foot slides forward. If your toes are touching the front end of your shoes, then they are too small! Remember – your longest toe may not necessarily be your big toe!



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GAIT ANALYSIS

Did you know?

The first pioneer of scientific gait analysis was Aristotle (384BC-322BC) in his writings *De Motu Animalium* (On the Gait of Animals).

If you can understand how you move – and the impact this can have on your body and overall health – then you are well placed to resolve a range of health issues early on.

What is gait?

Gait simply refers to the way a person walks. An abnormal gait can be caused by one or more parts of the body (such as the hips or knees) underperforming, which can lead to imbalances elsewhere in the body when moving.

What is a gait analysis?

Gait analysis is a system of scientific analysis used by podiatrists to study how the body moves – or its biomechanics and effects on the feet, hips, lower back and limbs. During gait analysis your body's movements are observed, measured, recorded and assessed. Then a diagnosis can be made, and treatments can be prescribed for conditions which may be affecting your ability to walk, or are causing you recurring pain.

What can it tell you about your body?

Gait analysis can tell you a lot about your body and how you move. For example, if you are suffering hip pain, this could be related to the way you walk. You might be in-toeing (turning your feet inwards) or out-toeing (turning your feet outwards), and the compensation your muscles are making to keep you upright may be the cause of your pain. Or perhaps your knees or hips turn in, which can affect the quality of your movement – a podiatrist doesn't just study the feet in a gait analysis.

It is important to note that compensations in the body can lead to imbalance around the joints and the main muscles – such as hamstrings, glutes, quads, and calves. This means those areas may become less active and end up contributing less than they should. A gait analysis will reveal such issues.

If you are in pain, have had an accident, or are an athlete seeking to improve your performance, gait analysis – conducted by a podiatrist – is an essential diagnostic tool.

What happens in a gait analysis?

In a standard gait analysis you will be asked to stand, walk and run on a treadmill and probably on a normal floor too, with your motion possibly being filmed at various angles for playback and further observation. Sometimes sensors are used in more complex analyses. After that any necessary treatments and exercises to fix your specific issue can be prescribed.



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INCORRECTLY FITTED SHOES

Did you know?

Most people have one foot that is larger than the other. Make sure you have both feet measured – and fit your shoes to the larger foot.

You may be wearing incorrectly fitted shoes and simply not be aware of this. Whatever the circumstance, here is how you can help to ensure your shoes fit correctly.

How do you know if your shoes fit correctly?

Here are some tips to help ensure your shoes fit correctly.

- Are you in pain? Pain is the most obvious signal that your shoes are ill-fitting – does taking your shoes off give you relief? This is your biggest clue!
- Is there enough space between your longest toe and the end of the shoe? Look for around 1.5 centimetres of space ideally. Remember, your big toe may not always be your longest toe.
- Have you tested a range of surfaces? Check how your shoes move with your feet when walking on carpet, tiled areas or other surfaces – your heels shouldn't move inside your shoes on any surface.
- Have you looked at the widest part of the shoe? This should match where the ball of your foot sits, that is, the widest part just before your toes.
- Have you had your feet measured by a professional? Ideally have your feet measured before buying shoes – preferably at the end of the day, as this is when your feet are at their largest.

What ailments can be caused by incorrectly fitted shoes?

These include:

- Plantar fasciitis** – you may experience a deep ache or shooting pain in the heel if you have plantar fasciitis.
- Bunions** – can present as a swelling or deformity of the first joint of the big toe.
- Blisters** – can be caused by a range of reasons, but a friction blister is usually caused by tight shoes that create irritation through the foot rubbing against the shoe.
- Metatarsalgia** – this condition is when the ball of the foot becomes so inflamed it can be unbearable to stand or walk.
- Corns and calluses** – can be caused by continuous friction between the foot and the shoe, which can be avoided by wearing correctly fitted shoes.

Where can you go to get shoes fitted correctly?

A podiatrist is able to assess whether your current shoes fit correctly and make recommendations if not. When in store, ask to be professionally measured and fitted before buying any shoes.



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FUNGAL AND NAIL INFECTIONS

Did you know...

Toenail fungus is more common than you may think... around 10% of the Australian adult population is affected by Onychomycosis (*Tinea unguium*) – a very typical form of nail fungus, often found on the foot!

No-one likes to talk about it, but many people experience fungal and nail infections. Read on to see how to avoid these types of infections, and what to do if you have an infection on your feet or toenails.

Nail fungus is often caused by something called 'dermatophytes', which are fungi found growing on skin, hair, nails and other bodily surfaces.

When dermatophytes get underneath your nail, it causes yellow/brownish discolouration and the nail can become quite thick and maintain a crumbly texture when cut.

If left untreated, the skin underneath your nail can become inflamed and/or painful – and it may retain a foul smell. It is so important to contact a podiatrist at the first indication of a fungal or nail infection, to avoid further complications.

How can you avoid fungal and nail infections?

The answer mostly lies in good foot hygiene. Examples include:

- Frequently wash your feet
- Never share nail clippers or nail files
- Avoid going barefoot in public establishments – such as showers or pool areas
- Keep your nails trimmed regularly with no sharp edges
- Never wear the same pair of socks two days in a row
- Never share footwear with other people
- Wear footwear that fits properly and is breathable

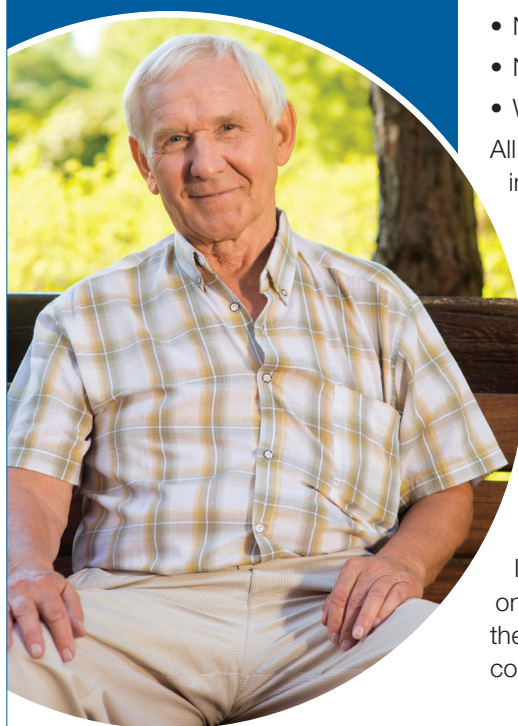
All of the above will help to keep germs at bay, and prevent moisture from building up in these regions, which can lead to infection.

How can you treat fungal and nail infections?

Some at-home treatments include washing your socks and/or hosiery with a combination of hot water and an anti-fungal wash. It can also help to clean and air your shoes regularly, alternating them with another pair to allow for a thorough cleaning.

Keep all floor surfaces clean by vacuuming regularly – and be sure to disinfect the base of your shower or tub directly after someone with a fungal infection has showered or soaked.

In addition, pharmaceutical antifungal treatments can include a range of products on the market. It is very important to precisely follow the instructions outlined on these products – and follow through until the infection is completely resolved. If your condition doesn't improve or worsens, please see a podiatrist.



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PAIN

Did you know...

Your feet hold 25% of the bones in your body – each foot has a total of 26 bones with 33 joints – and more than a hundred muscles, tendons, and ligaments?

Are you experiencing pain in your feet or lower limbs? This can provide clues to many related ailments throughout your body. Here is a round-up of what your various pain signals may indicate.

What are the main causes of foot and lower limb pain?

There are many causes of this kind of pain, including:

- Heel pain (plantar fasciitis)
- Injury – such as sprains, breaks and fractures
- Arthritis – inflammation of the joints and other tissues
- Tendonitis – inflammation of the tendon structures that attach to the bones of your feet (e.g. the Achilles which connects your calf muscle to your feet)
- Shin splints – refers to pain felt anywhere along the shinbone from the knee to the ankle
- Peripheral vascular disease – where blood flow is constricted
- Sever's disease – is a common cause of heel pain, particularly in young and physically active people
- Deep vein thrombosis – a blood clot that forms in the veins of the leg
- Sciatica and radiculopathy – pain in the buttock and leg caused by pressure on nerves in the lower back
- Flat feet, corns, calluses, bunions or a range of other ailments

How can you heal your pain?

A good step is to see your podiatrist, who can assess and treat you as part of a personalised treatment plan. It can also help to look after your overall general health – by drinking plenty of water, wearing correct footwear and exercising regularly where possible.

What is the best treatment?

No single treatment works for everyone, which is why it is so important to see a podiatrist who can tailor a treatment plan to specifically reflect your needs.

Treatment for pain can be varied – to include anti-inflammatory medications such as aspirin, ibuprofen, and naproxen. Whereas if swelling and inflammation is the cause of pain – ice packs, strapping and stretching can form part of your treatment plan. For biomechanical issues – such as flat feet or bunions – orthotics may be prescribed as part of a wider treatment plan.

Given the complexity of ailments affecting the feet and lower limbs, only your podiatrist can prescribe the treatment most suited to your needs. Most importantly, don't self-diagnose pain treatment – please see a podiatrist.



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WHEN TO SEE A PODIATRIST

Did you know...

The average person walks up to 128,000 kilometres in their lifetime? This distance is equivalent to three laps around the world!

Do you think you may need to see a podiatrist? Learn more about the role of podiatrists in foot health – and how this can benefit your general overall health.

Podiatrists are foot health experts who are university-trained to prevent, diagnose, treat and rehabilitate medical and surgical conditions of the feet and lower limbs. Often, these conditions stem from other underlying health issues such as diabetes, stress fractures and arthritis.

Podiatrists are all around you, and they work in both public health centres and private practice clinics. To find a podiatrist near you, you can search by location at **podiatry.org.au**

Why do people see podiatrists?

Your feet house a quarter of the bones in our entire bodies – in addition to various muscles, ligaments and joints. This makes them extremely vulnerable to injury and diseases that can affect the entire body.

A podiatrist will not just look at your foot, but they will carry out a biomechanical assessment to see how your gait can be impacting other parts of your body, such as your hips. (Your gait is the way you walk.)

Podiatrists fully understand the structure and movement of the foot and lower limbs. They are able to diagnose foot conditions, identify systemic overall health conditions that present with foot or lower limb symptoms – and recommend appropriate treatment plans.

When should you see a podiatrist?

You may be experiencing pain in your feet, ingrown or discoloured skin/nails, corns, skin rashes, foot odour, foot injuries, broader health problems such as diabetes or arthritis, recurrent tripping or falling, problems fitting comfortably in your regular shoes; or if you notice swelling, lumps, or redness on your feet or legs.

It is a common misconception that painful feet are a normal side effect from everyday activities. Yet research shows that only a fraction of individuals suffering from sore feet seek out professional advice.

Just as you would visit your dentist for a toothache, you should visit a podiatrist if you suffer from painful or tired feet and/or lower limbs.



Find a podiatrist at **podiatry.org.au**

This fact sheet is available as a single page download from podiatry.org.au



Pods get **you...**

moving, pain-free and living a fuller life!

FOOT HEALTH WEEK | 15 – 21 OCTOBER 2018



Do you need to see a podiatrist?

Here is a handy checklist. Do you...

- ☐ Have painful feet?
- ☐ Experience leg pain?
- ☐ Have painful knees?
- ☐ Experience sore hips?
- ☐ Find walking or standing uncomfortable?
- ☐ Experience leg or foot pain during sport?
- ☐ Need advice on correct footwear?

Ticked one or more boxes? Then you need to see a podiatrist.

Go see a podiatrist

Because...

- ✓ Podiatrists are Foot Health Experts and understand the structure and movement of your feet and lower limbs.
 - ✓ They can assess, diagnose and treat foot, ankle, knee, leg or hip pain.
- Given your feet alone house a quarter of the bones in your entire body, a podiatrist is best placed to get you moving, active or pain-free.

Find a podiatrist near you

Contact the Australian Podiatry Association at **podiatry.org.au** and search by postcode or suburb to find a podiatrist close to you.



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