



Foot Health Fact Sheet

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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WHAT IS A PODIATRIST?

Did you know...

Podiatrists are lower limb experts who are university-trained to prevent, diagnose, treat and rehabilitate medical and surgical conditions of the feet and lower limbs.

Podiatrists are lower limb 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 and arthritis. However, Podiatrists also manage a large amount of acute/sports injuries like ankle sprains, plantar fasciitis, stress fractures, Achilles tendonitis, shin splints, patellofemoral joint syndrome and much more.

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 **foothealthaustralia.org.au**

Why do people see podiatrists?

Your feet house a quarter of the bones in our entire bodies – in addition to many more various muscles, tendons, 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 and back. (Your gait is the way you walk.)

Podiatrists are university educated to understand the structure and movement of the foot and lower limbs. They 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. You should see a podiatrist 1-2 times a year for a general check-up/maintenance in the same way as you should a dentist. You don't need a GP referral to see a podiatrist. Podiatrists can also connect you into other allied health professionals and specialists to work in a team that gets the best outcomes for you.



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COMMON SPORTING INJURIES

Did you know?

There are two kinds of sports injuries? Acute injuries happen suddenly and chronic injuries happen after you play a sport or exercise over a long period of time.

Do you experience pain after exercising? Here are some of the most common sporting injuries, which can affect your legs and feet – to explain why they occur, and how your podiatrist can help.

Do you experience heel pain in the morning?

Did you know that plantar fasciitis is the most common form of heel pain? While there are many reasons for morning foot pain, plantar fasciitis is common in runners and dancers. It's best to ask your podiatrist for an assessment, diagnosis and treatment if you are experiencing any kind of heel pain.

Do you have a painful big toe?

This could be Sesamoiditis, which can be caused by anything from 'weekend warrior' workouts, to high intensity activities. It can help to rest or take a break from the activity and check your shoes are the correct type for the activity you are doing. If pain persists, see your podiatrist who can help.

Do you have a bruised toenail?

This is caused by a haematoma. A haematoma is a bleed under the nail, which can be caused by ill-fitting shoes when running or hiking. The first thing you may want to do is check the fit of your shoes is correct – and see your podiatrist if symptoms don't improve.

Do you have painful knees or hips?

Sore knees and hips are caused by many reasons, but often surprisingly, this pain can be caused by your gait, which is the way you walk. A podiatrist doesn't just focus on the feet, they can look at the biomechanics of your foot and lower limb region to assess the potential cause of any hip or knee pain.

Do you have a painful ball of the foot?

This can make walking – or any exercise – very challenging! You might have a stress fracture or a neuroma. When it comes to likely causes for a painful ball of the foot, the list of possibilities is endless. Make sure you book in with your podiatrist to have this properly assessed and treated.

Do you have sore shins?

This could be shin splints, which can be caused by a range of factors – and treated by your podiatrist.



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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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TOP TIPS TO CARE FOR YOUR FEET

Did you know...

Your feet are mirrors of your health! Foot issues are warning signs of underlying health conditions, yet many foot problems can be prevented if noticed early.

Richard Lee, registered Podiatrist and Director of The Walking Clinic, recommends these top tips to care for your feet:

1. Maintain healthy nails

A very common thing podiatrists see on a daily basis, are fungal nail infections, this is when the nail becomes discoloured, thickened and brittle.

Mr Lee says, "To help avoid fungal nail infections, frequently wash and dry your feet, avoid going barefoot in public showers or pool areas (thongs are great to wear in public showers), don't wear the same pair of socks two days in a row, hang your socks inside out in the sun (UV light is a natural fungus killer), don't share footwear with other people, air your shoes regularly in the sun and try not to wear the same pair of shoes each day."

Mr Lee suggests adding a drop of tea tree oil into your moisturiser, or adding a few drops to your washing, when washing socks. Making up a diluted spray and spraying your feet can help reduce the risk of fungal infection.

2. Wear correctly fitting shoes

Up to twice your bodyweight in force is applied through your feet and legs with every step, so it's important to have comfortable and appropriate footwear. To avoid pain it is important to have shoes that fit well and are comfortable, especially so for athletes and people who are constantly working on their feet, including tradespeople, teachers, hospital staff, police and emergency services.

Mr Lee says, "We commonly see that people wear shoes that are too small for them, so make sure that there is about 1.5 centimetres (thumb width) of space between your longest toe, which may not be your big toe, and the end of the shoe. Having a shoe that bends with your feet, especially at your toes, is also important not only for comfort, but also for facilitating training routines.

"Don't underestimate comfort, there is now evidence to say that shoe comfort can help reduce injury risk, so make sure that you get the shoe that is most comfortable not just your favourite colour."

3. Foot and lower limb pain or tiredness

It is very important not to ignore what your feet and legs are telling you. One of the most common serious foot conditions in Australia is Plantar Fasciitis, which is noticeable through a deep ache or shooting pain in the heel. Tired feeling legs is another common complaint podiatrist's see.

Mr Lee says, "There can be many different reasons why people might be getting tired legs, from muscle fatigue due to muscle imbalance, through to reduced blood flow or blood pooling in the legs. Seeking podiatry advice can help manage these symptoms and improve your quality of life."



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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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SCHOOL SHOES

Did you know?

You should avoid shoes made from synthetic materials, as children's feet perspire and need to be able to breathe.

Do you want to keep an eye on your children's feet and ensure their school shoes fit correctly? Learn how to support growing feet – at school and beyond.

Your children's feet will spend most of their growth period in school shoes. This is why it is so important to seek out sound advice on the correct fitting of school shoes. Whether your child is standing, sitting, walking, running, jumping or skipping; their feet are always on the move. Purchasing shoes that support your child's feet is usually at the top of the 'back to school' shopping list.

How do you pick the right school shoe for your child?

All shoes should protect your children's feet – but particularly school shoes, since children spend so much time in them. To ensure their shoes fit properly, make sure you have your children's feet measured regularly for length and width; so the shoe fits the natural shape of their foot, especially around the toes. A podiatrist is well placed to carry out this task.

Specifically, the toe of the shoe should allow your child's toes to move freely and not be squashed from the top or the sides. Make sure there is about 1cm growing room between the end of their longest toe and the top end of their shoe. Also bear in mind that shoes should fit comfortably around the heel, and not be too loose or too tight.

Having shoes fitted by a store that offers trained assistants can also help ensure the correct size and shape to keep little feet running and jumping.

When should you seek advice from a podiatrist?

A podiatrist can help ensure your child's school shoes fit correctly. A check-up with a podiatrist is also recommended if you notice changes, such as uneven shoe wear on the heels; or if pain is reported such as skin rashes, hard skin, lumps, bumps or itching on your child's feet. A podiatrist can also help your child if they complain of recurrent pain in their feet or legs, especially as activities increase at school; or if your child is constantly tripping or falling at school – or outside of school.

You should also consider the help of a podiatrist if you notice your child walks on their tip toes, or their walk does not look symmetrical (the same on both feet and legs); or if you have any other general concerns about your child's foot health.



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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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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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FOOT HEALTH AND HOMELESSNESS

Did you know...

It is estimated that
at least 106,000
people are homeless in
Australia on any
one night.

If you are homeless, or helping people who are experiencing homelessness, you will know that foot health can be a challenge. Here is how you can make a difference.

How can homelessness affect foot health?

Studies show that people who are homeless consequently have inadequate foot hygiene practices and improperly-fitting shoes.

Considering footwear is often insufficient – and walking is a common mode of transport for homeless people – calluses and corns are commonly seen. Secondary issues including foot infections and nail pathologies, such as ingrown toenails, are also common.

What common foot ailments exist in people who have diabetes and are experiencing homelessness?

People who are experiencing homelessness and have diabetes can find it challenging, given access to treatment can be limited. Symptoms such as difficulty when walking, loss of foot sensitivity and reduced blood flow, or permanently reduced mobility are found in a significant percentage of people experiencing homelessness, and the need for lower limb amputation can occur as a result of diabetes.

What types of treatment can be given?

You will no doubt already know that health and housing are intrinsically linked. The best thing for the health of a person who is homeless is permanent stable housing.

In terms of treatment, podiatrists often volunteer their skills at homeless services throughout Australia; to assess, diagnose and treat a range of ailments. Drop in services are also available to people experiencing homelessness, and hostel visits can be potentially arranged. Ask your local homeless service for more details, or ask them to contact the Australian Podiatry Association who may be able to help locate such services.



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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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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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FOOT ULCERS – TREATMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Did you know...

If foot ulcers are not adequately managed and treated, it can eventually lead to amputation.

Foot and leg ulcers are caused by a range of factors, and require timely intervention. Here is how you can help prevent – or manage – an ulcer on your feet or legs.

What is a foot or leg ulcer?

Foot and leg ulcers are open sores caused by a break in the skin which fails to heal. It is important to get treatment from a health professional as soon as you can.

What causes foot ulcers?

Ulcers can develop for a range of reasons including blisters, open wounds, pressure or circulation problems.

Ulcers are more likely to occur when either your circulation or nerve supply in your feet and legs is damaged. Ulcers may develop from blisters caused by incorrectly fitting shoes, from injuries and skin tears, and from pressure due to loss of feeling in the feet. Ulcers on the feet and legs increase the risk of having an amputation particularly in persons with diabetes.

How do you manage ulcers?

Prevention is better than cure. Check your skin daily and treat all open wounds immediately. Wash your feet daily, apply moisturiser to the skin and wear protective footwear such as socks and shoes. If an ulcer develops consult a health professional as soon as possible. Podiatrists are able to manage your wound care, advise on correctly fitting footwear and supply and fit padding or special shoes to manage pressure areas. In some cases you may need to have a walking boot or plaster cast on your foot to encourage the ulcer to heal.

What is the best treatment?

Ulcers should be treated by a podiatrist (or wound specialist) who can remove the dead tissue in the wound and provide appropriate dressings to encourage the tissue to heal.

Prevention of infection is very important when treating ulcers, and sometimes an x-ray may be required to see whether an infection has spread to the bone.

If you have circulation problems you may need to see a vascular surgeon to improve the blood flow to your feet.

Your podiatrist can work with the wound clinic, general practitioner, vascular surgeon and other members of your health team to provide comprehensive care to manage the ulcer.



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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?

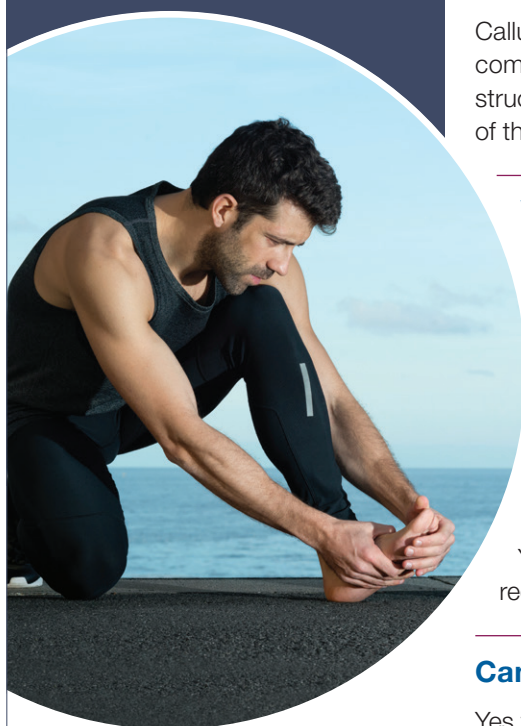
Because calluses are generally symptoms of other problems, it is important to have a podiatrist examine your feet and biomechanics to work out the cause.

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.



Find a podiatrist at foothealthaustralia.org.au

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Foot Health Fact Sheet

CHILBLAINS

Did you know...

Chilblains are common, mainly affecting young adults working outdoors in the cold or people who do not wear socks or tights in winter. Elderly people, whose circulation is less efficient, people who don't exercise enough and those suffering from anaemia are also susceptible.

During the onset of winter, susceptible people will experience burning and itching on their hands and feet. Upon entering a warm room, the itching and burning is intensified (not really needed). There may also be some swelling or redness and in extreme cases the surface of the skin may break and sores (ulcers) may develop.

What are chilblains?

Chilblains (also called pernio) are small itchy, red (and sometimes purple) swellings on the skin, which can become increasingly painful, can swell and then dry out leaving cracks in the skin that expose the foot to the risk of infection. They may occur on the toes (particularly the smaller ones), fingers, the face (especially the nose) and the lobes of the ears. They can also occur on areas of the feet exposed to pressure, for instance on a bunion or where the second toe is squeezed by tight shoes. They can also lead to blisters and break down to become a small ulcer prone to infection.

What causes them?

Chilblains develop when the tiny blood vessels under the skin constrict under cold conditions reducing the flow of blood until the area warms up again and causes some leakage of fluid into the surrounding tissue. - (note: probably not needed as is explained in the next sentence - too technical) They are caused by the skin's abnormal reaction to cold but not everyone develops them as this depends to a large extent on the efficiency of your circulation. People with poor circulation and other health problems involving their blood vessels are likely to be more prone to developing chilblains. In addition, damp or draughty conditions (note: not really needed), dietary factors and hormonal imbalance can also be contributory factors. It is thought that rapid temperature changes from cold to hot can also be a cause. If the skin is chilled and is then followed by too rapid warming next to a fire or through using a hot water bottle, chilblains may result.

How can I prevent and treat them?

The best way to prevent chilblains is to keep your legs, feet and body warm, especially if your circulation is poor and your mobility is limited.

The whole body, rather than just the feet, needs to be kept warm. Trousers, long boots, tights, leg warmers, long socks and gloves will also help.

If you have developed chilblains try not to scratch them, instead use soothing lotions such as witch hazel and calamine on them to take away most of the discomfort.

If the chilblain has ulcerated, apply an antiseptic dressing. If you have diabetes or are undergoing medical treatment, do have the ulcer assessed by your podiatrist.



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Foot Health Fact Sheet

GOUT

Did you know...

One in 200 people are affected by gout and more men than women are affected. It tends to appear in middle age but can run in families also.

Arthritis is a disease of the joints which causes them to become inflamed and stiffen. There are three types of arthritis – Rheumatoid arthritis, Osteo-arthritis and the less common form, Gout.

What is gout and what causes it?

Gout is the result of an imbalance of uric acid in the body and manifests via a build-up of uric acid in the blood. Small crystals may form, which collect in the joint causing irritation and inflammation, and which can be very painful and severe.

Apart from the severe pain that gout causes, most other effects of gout are uncommon but it can include kidney damage via crystals forming to create kidney stones which are notorious for being extremely painful to pass.

What are the symptoms?

The main symptom of gout is waking up in the middle of the night with an acute throbbing pain in the big toe, which is swollen. Usually only one of the big toes is affected. The pain lasts for a few hours and usually subsides then doesn't return for a few months.

How do I prevent it?

You can reduce your chances of having attacks by leading a healthy lifestyle by:

- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Eating a healthy diet including what you drink (i.e. avoiding too much alcohol or fizzy drinks)
- Making sure there is plenty of Vitamin C in your diet.

What are the treatments?

Gout can be controlled and regulated with anti-inflammatory drugs, which your GP will be able to prescribe, and these will alleviate the attack over 24 hours or so. An immediate measure is to levitate your leg to help reduce swelling along with the application of ice or cooling lotions while waiting for your medication to take effect.

Your local podiatrist will also be able to help alleviate issues by adapting your existing footwear with orthoses or other appliances which fit easily into your shoes and help redistribute pressure away from the affected parts.

Made-to-measure shoes can also be prescribed and your podiatrist will be able to advise you on the correct type of shoes to wear and where to obtain them. They can also provide protective shields for your toes or padding to relieve pressure and reduce friction. Any secondary problems like ulcers or corns can also be treated. They can also refer you to a specialist for more serious cases.



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DO YOU NEED TO SEE A PODIATRIST?



DOES THE FOLLOWING APPLY TO YOU OR YOUR FAMILY?

- ☐ Can you only walk for a short period before your feet or legs hurt?
- ☐ Do you experience pain in your lower limbs at night?
- ☐ Do you experience tingling in your feet?
- ☐ Have you noticed your legs or feet are swollen?
- ☐ Do you have cuts or fissures on your feet that take a long time to heal?
- ☐ Are you returning to sport after an injury?
- ☐ Are you uncertain about which running or sports shoe to buy?
- ☐ Do you find that you wear out the outside of your shoes quickly?
- ☐ Have you noticed your toes poke holes in the top of your shoes?
- ☐ Does your forefoot become hot and painful after running or walking?
- ☐ Do your hips hurt?
- ☐ Has pain in your feet or legs stopped you from exercising?
- ☐ Are you worried about your child's feet?
- ☐ Do you have arthritis in your feet?
- ☐ Do you experience reoccurring gouty attacks?
- ☐ Are you worried about the thickness of your nails?
- ☐ Do you have discoloured toe nails?
- ☐ Are you worried about your foot odour?
- ☐ Do your toe nails cause you pain?
- ☐ Have you noticed your toes are clawed?
- ☐ Do you have hard skin on your feet? Is it getting worse?
- ☐ Do you find it hard to cut your own nails?
- ☐ Do you find it hard to fit your feet into shoes because of your bunion?

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

Head to **foothealthaustralia.org.au** and search by postcode or suburb to find a podiatrist close to you.



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

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