Healthy feet

To keep your feet healthy you need to look after them; keeping them clean, warm and well-supported.

Foot Care

Caring for your feet is vitally important when you are older, as foot problems can rob you of your mobility and independence. Older feet do naturally develop more problems because the skin tends to thin and lose its elasticity, and so healing can take longer.

If you neglect your feet, the effects of poor circulation can go unchecked, which in turn can lead to unnecessary suffering. Good foot care is especially important if you have diabetes.

- **Keep your feet clean** – This is really important and is the main way to prevent infections. Wash your feet every day in warm soapy water. Don't soak your feet in water for long periods of time though, as this can destroy their natural oils and will lead to very dry skin. Rinse your feet well and dry them gently with a soft thin towel or tissue.

- **Trim your toenails regularly** – They should be cut straight across, so that they are level with the ends of your toes and aren't too short. You can buy nail clippers to help you to cut your toe nails correctly. Cutting your nails properly will help to prevent in-growing toenails, which can require treatment from a podiatrist (which is another name for a chiropodist).

- **Exercise your feet** – Exercise can really help to keep your feet healthy. It tones up your muscles, helps to strengthen your arches, and stimulates blood circulation.

- **Rest your feet** – When you sit down for a rest, it is helpful to get into the habit of putting your feet up. Aim to have your feet a few inches higher than your hips.

Common Foot Problems

Don't ignore minor foot troubles, such as corns or bunions. They can easily get worse if you don't seek proper attention and treatment and will cause you a lot more discomfort in the future.

Athlete's Foot

Athlete’s foot is a fungal infection, which is very contagious. Symptoms can include an itchy rash, splitting of the skin between your toes, and blisters on the skin under your toes.

You are more prone to getting athlete’s foot in hot weather, when your feet sweat more, as the fungus grows in warm and moist areas. Wear sandals or open-toed shoes to let more air circulate around your feet.

You can treat athlete’s foot with an anti-fungal powder or cream, which gets rid of the fungus. You can buy these products from your pharmacist.

Bunions

Bunions are a deformity of the big toe joint, which produces a painful and enlarged joint that can make walking difficult.

A short-term solution to ease the discomfort is to use a bunion shield, which you can buy from your pharmacist. Wearing shoes to accommodate your bunion will also help. In the longer term, you should get advice from a podiatrist (or chiropodist) on how to treat the condition.

Calluses

Calluses are also caused by pressure or friction, and produce areas of hard skin on your feet.

They are different to corns, as they don’t have a central core and they can grow over any bony area, usually on the ball of your foot. They can give a burning sensation, which is caused by the friction of your foot moving back and forth in your shoe.

Most calluses can be treated or protected with products that you can buy over the counter from your pharmacist. However, you should ask for advice from your pharmacist before using any products. If you are having frequent problems, you should visit a podiatrist (or chiropodist).

Chilblains

Chilblains are the result of poor circulation in cold and damp weather. Symptoms can include redness, tingling, and an itching sensation, accompanied by inflammation and swelling.

In cold weather, you should try to avoid heating your feet up too quickly (for example in a hot bath, in front of a fire, or by resting them on a hot water bottle) and you should try to wear long woolly socks that will keep your feet warm.

Doing regular foot exercises and bathing your feet alternately in warm and cold water will help to stimulate your circulation. Remember, not to soak your feet in water for a long time though.

Corns

Corns are caused by pressure over bony areas, particularly over your joints, the end of your toes, and under your feet. Corns can be a sign that your shoes don't fit properly. If a corn presses down on a nerve, it can often cause pain.

If you have a corn you shouldn't cut it yourself, especially if you are older or have diabetes. Most corns can be treated or protected with products that you can buy over the counter from your pharmacist. However, you should ask for advice from your pharmacist before using any products. If you are having frequent problems, you should visit a podiatrist (or chiropodist).

Verrucae

Verrucae are warts on the feet caused by a virus. Treatment is recommended only if they are extremely painful, as it can interfere with your body's natural response to rid itself of the virus. They will go away of their own accord when your body builds up resistance to the virus.

If you have a painful verruca, you should see a podiatrist (or chiropodist) who will choose a suitable treatment to match the type and number of growths on your foot. It isn't recommended that you try to treat the verruca yourself.

Going to See a Podiatrist (or Chiropodist)

A **podiatrist** is another name for a chiropodist. Registered podiatrists (or chiropodists) are trained in all aspects of care for the feet and lower limbs.

Buying New Footwear

It is really important that new shoes, boots or slippers fit properly and allow your feet to breathe. As you get older, the size and shape of your feet can change, so don't hesitate to ask to have your feet measured before you buy footwear.

Make sure that you can get the shoes on and off by yourself. A shoe horn with a long handle could help you. Alternatively, if you find tying laces difficult, buy footwear with velcro fastenings.

Another tip is to buy shoes in the afternoon. As some people's feet swell throughout the day, shoes that fit well in the morning may become too tight by the evening.

You may want to buy insoles to help to cushion your feet, but only wear them if you have enough room in your shoes to do so.

Other Useful Information

- **The Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists**
- **Age UK's Guide to Healthy Living**

Other Useful Organisations

- **NHS 111** is the new telephone service which has replaced NHS Direct. You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is a fast and easy way to get the right help, whatever the time.
- **NHS.UK** is a website providing health and medical advice, an online symptom checker and a facility for searching for services near you.

> **Please note** – The content on this website is provided for general information only, and should not be treated as a substitute for the medical advice of your own doctor or any other health care professional. If you are feeling unwell, make an appointment to see your GP or contact **NHS 111**. In an emergency, dial **999**.

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Useful Organisations

The Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists

Email: reception@scpod.org

Website: https://cop.org.uk/

Telephone: 020 7234 8620

Address: 2nd Floor Quartz House , SE1 2EW

Podiatry Department

Email: newcastle.podiatry@nhs.net

Website: https://www.newcastle-hospitals.nhs.uk/services/podiatry-service/

Telephone: 0191 282 3334

Address: Geoffrey Rhodes Centre, NE6 2UZ

NHS 111

Website: www.nhs.uk/111

Diabetes UK

Email: helpline@diabetes.org.uk

Website: www.diabetes.org.uk

Telephone: 0345 123 2399

Address: Wells Lawrence House, E1 1FH

Diabetes UK Local Support (North)

Email: hannah.morrow@diabetes.org.uk

Website: https://www.diabetes.org.uk/how_we_help/local_support_groups

Telephone: 0780 138 8237

Address: Diabetes UK (North), WA2 7LT

Newcastle Diabetes Centre

Website: https://www.newcastle-hospitals.nhs.uk/services/newcastle-diabetes-centre/

Telephone: 0191 282 3867

Address: Freeman Hospital, NE7 7DN

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