

Looking after your own feet

Skin Care

- You should wash your feet every day. If you are unable to get into the shower or bath regularly, it may be easier to wash your feet using a large bowl.
- Before you start, make sure you have everything you need beside you:
 - some soap
 - a soft brush, such as a nail brush
 - a clean dry towel
- Fill the basin half full of warm water. Sit comfortably on a chair and place both your feet in the water. Use the soap to lather up and clean all areas of your feet, making sure you get in between your toes. Use the soft brush to rub over the nails. Try not to soak your feet for longer than 10 minutes, otherwise you will dry out the skin. Dry both of your feet, taking care to pat dry in-between your toes. If you find it difficult to dry in-between your toes, you could try using cotton buds or folded cotton wool pads.
- If your skin is dry, apply a moisturising cream every day over the dry areas – usually the tops, the heel and the soles of the feet. Massage the cream in well using small circular movements. Do not put cream in between your toes.

- > If your skin is very moist, after your daily wash, use cotton wool that is wet with some surgical spirit to dab the soles of the feet and in between your toes.
- > It is natural for feet to sweat, but sometimes this can be extreme. Sweaty feet can cause an odour and can make the skin between the toes become white and damp. This is why it is important to wash and dry your feet thoroughly every day.
- > You can remove small patches of hard skin from your feet by using a foot file or pumice stone. To do so, gently rub the affected area in one direction.

Common Skincare Questions

Q. Should I use talcum powder?

A. Only very sparingly. It should be dusted off so that only a small amount remains on the skin.

Q. What about steeping my feet in a basin of hot water?

A. This is not necessary and may even strip the skin of its natural oils.

Q. Is there a special kind of cream I should use?

A. No. Any non-medicated cream will add moisture to the skin.

Nail care

- > Some things that you might like to keep in a personal foot care kit are nail clippers, nail files or emery boards, foot files or pumice stones, moisturising cream, surgical spirit and plasters.

- > You can buy nail clippers, files and emery boards in your local high street or online. To keep your personal foot care tools clean and in good order, wash metal and plastic items in warm soapy water after you use them. Then rinse them in clear, hot or cold water and allow them to dry thoroughly before storing them in your plastic box or bag.
- > Preventing the spread of germs is very important. You should have your own personal nail clippers and file, keep them for your use only, and always wash and dry your hands before and after cutting your toenails.
- > Before you start, make sure you have your nail clippers and file to hand and sit near a good light source (like a window). One way to cut your toenails is by using two chairs or stools of a similar height. Sit on one and face the other towards you. Bring one leg towards your chest, bending at the knee, and rest the arch of your foot on the edge of the other chair or stool. Cut the toenails on one foot, then swap over and do the other foot when you are ready.
- > To cut your nails, make several small clips or nibbles on the nail with the tip of the nail clippers. Cut the nails following their natural shape. Aim to have the final length of the nail just below the tip of each toe. Do not cut down the sides of nails as this can leave the surrounding skin uncomfortable.

- > If your toe bleeds when cutting your nails, clean the area with lukewarm water and apply light pressure with a piece of cotton wool or cloth. Cover the cut with a clean dressing and leave in place for 48 hours. Contact your GP practice for advice if you are worried that the area is not healing properly.

- > Remove any rough edges of your nails using a nail file or emery board. File the nails in the direction away from the ankle, or in a sideways motion from the sides to the centre of each nail. It is easier to file nails when they are dry. Filing nails once a week will keep them at a reasonable length. You do not need to cut or file all 10 toenails at one go– you can spread this out over several days, if this is better for you. When you are finished, wash your hands and throw the nail clippings in your bin. You may prefer to file your nails regularly, as this avoids the need to clip your nails.

Common Nailcare Questions

- Q.** What should I do about the stuff down the sides of the nails?
A. If it is not hurting, leave it alone. If sore, then gentle scrubbing, as advised above, will loosen the dead skin cells and sock fluff.

- Q.** Will it help to cut a “V” in the middle of the toenail?
A. No. This used to be advised but makes no difference.

- Q.** My nails are very thick. How can I cut them?
A. You may find it easier to file the nails weekly when they are dry.

Footwear

Footwear includes shoes, slippers, socks or tights, as well as anything else that goes on your feet. Wear shoes that are suited to the activity you are doing. A good shoe should support and protect your foot and allow natural movement during walking. Poorly fitting footwear can cause problems, such as corns, calluses and ingrowing toenails. Socks should contain a high amount of natural materials, such as cotton or wool, as this allows sweat to evaporate from the skin. Wear wool in winter for warmth, and cotton in summer for coolness. Make sure socks and tights are not too tight, or pulled up too tight, as this will stop them from cutting into the skin.

- Always get the right size and width. You should be able to wriggle your toes inside the shoes comfortably.
- Shoes should be broad enough at the toes so that there is no pressure.
- A good depth between the upper and the sole of the shoe prevents toes rubbing
- The higher the heel, the more pressure there will be on the ball of your foot.
- Your heel height should be no more than 2 inches or 5cm high. If they are too high, this allows the feet to slide forward in the shoe, causing the toes to be cramped.

- > For everyday use, shoes with fastenings of some sort are a good idea. This will act like the seat belt in a car, preventing too much movement of the foot in the shoe.
- > A thick rubber sole is recommended, as this acts as a shock absorber and protects the soles.
- > Watch out for seams or stitching, as these can lead to painful areas on the toes.

Common Footwear Questions

Q. Are trainers bad for my feet?

A. No, provided they are the right size. These days trainers are designed very carefully to provide the best kind of support for the foot.

Q. What sort of fastening do you recommend?

A. Laces are best, but a strap, buckle or Velcro fastening will also work. The important thing this is that they are fastened after you put your foot in.

Q. Can I never ever wear high heels again?

A. The important thing is to wear the right shoes for the right occasion. For everyday use, a shoe with a flattish heel, rounded toe box, thick rubber sole and fastening is usually the most appropriate.

Things to look out for

If your toe or part of your foot is:

- > Red
- > Hot and swollen
- > Painful
- > Leaking blood or fluid, such as pus

If you have any of these and are worried about your feet, then contact your local NHS podiatry department or your GP practice for advice. If you are looking for general information on footcare, ask your local chemists, pharmacy, or NHS podiatry department.