

# FOOT CARE



We often don't pay much attention to our feet, even though we use them to get around. Feet can become susceptible to injuries and diseases, especially when we age. Feet lose cushioning, skin becomes dry, and nails become brittle. On top of this, many seniors suffer from poor circulation, which can make it difficult for foot sores to heal. Fortunately, caring for feet is not too difficult. By taking some precautions, you can promote good health and help your elderly patient prevent foot issues. As a caregiver, you should help your loved one follow these 12 preventive-care steps.

## PREVENTION

Once a foot problem develops, providing proper care can be time-consuming and costly. Issues with the feet can be prevented with regular medical checkups. As a caregiver, you should make sure your patient has a foot exam at least once a year. If you have diabetes, you may need to see a podiatrist more often.

## COMMON FOOT ISSUES

- Ingrown toenails
- Dry skin
- Corns and calluses
- Athletes foot
- Too much pressure

## FOOT CARE TIPS

1. Encourage your loved one to keep his or her blood sugar within a good range by following his or her doctor's advice.
2. Encourage a routine of checking his or her feet top and bottom every day; looking for cuts, blisters, red spots, and swelling.
3. A daily regimen should include washing your loved one's feet in warm—not hot—water and drying them well, including between the toes.
4. The skin can be kept soft and smooth by rubbing a thin coat of skin lotion over the tops and bottoms of your loved one's feet, but not between the toes.
5. A pumice stone can be used to gently smooth corns and calluses.
6. Trim toenails straight across and file the edges with an emery board or nail file.
7. Discourage your loved one from walking barefoot. Check to see that he or she has comfortable shoes and socks that fit well and protect the feet.
8. Feet need to be protected from hot and cold, by wearing shoes at the beach or on hot pavement. Socks may be worn at night to avoid cold feet.
9. To keep the blood flowing, your loved one should put his or her feet up when sitting. Encourage him or her to practice wiggling his or her toes and moving the ankles up and down for 5 minutes, two or three times a day. Crossing the legs for long periods is bad for the circulation.
10. Encourage your loved one to talk with a doctor about a physical activity program that he or she can enjoy and maintain.
11. It is wise to have your loved one's doctor check his or her bare feet and find out whether he or she is likely to have serious foot problems. Remember that your loved one may not feel the pain of an injury. Call the doctor right away if a cut, sore, blister, or bruise on your loved one's foot does not begin to heal after one day. Follow their doctor's advice about foot care.

## FOOT CARE FOR DIABETES PATIENTS

Diabetes is a chronic condition that can affect the entire body – including the feet. A minor issue can quickly turn into a serious problem. That's because diabetes damages blood vessels, which can cause wounds to heal slowly. A small cut or blister can lead to gangrene, which may require amputation of the foot. To further complicate the issue, diabetes can make you unable to feel pain, so many patients have wounds and foot diseases and don't even know it.

If you have diabetes, you can prevent foot problems by keeping your blood sugar under control. Clean feet are healthy feet, so wash them in warm water daily. Check them daily for any blisters, calluses, or corns. Do not try to remove them yourself, as you could cause damage to your feet. Avoid going barefoot, as you could step on something that could cause injury to your feet. Always wear shoes, or socks at a minimum. Keep the blood flowing. Try to move around and exercise. Even wiggling your feet is helpful.

## TRIMMING TOENAILS

Try to trim the person's nails every week. Or check the nails each week to see if they need to be trimmed. It's easiest to trim nails after the person has had a shower or foot bath. It makes the nails softer and easier to trim.

To trim the nails:

1. Before you start, wash and dry your hands. You don't need to wear gloves.
2. Use nail polish remover to take off any polish.
3. Hold the person's foot and toe steady with one hand while you trim the nail with your other hand. Using toenail clippers, trim the nails straight across. Leave the nails a little longer at the corners so that the sharp ends don't cut into the skin.
4. Keep the nails no longer than the tip of the toes.
5. Let the nails dry if they are still damp and soft.
6. Use a nail file to gently smooth the edges of the nails, especially at the corners. They may be sharp after the nails are cut straight.
7. Apply nail polish, if the person wants it.
8. If the person's nails are thick and discolored, it may be safest to have a podiatrist cut them.

## GENERAL NAIL AND FOOT CARE

- Wash the feet daily in the shower or bath or in a basin made for washing feet. It's extra important to wash the feet carefully if the person has diabetes.
- After washing the feet, dry gently. Put lotion on the feet, especially on the heels. But don't put it between the toes.
- If the person doesn't have diabetes and you see signs of athlete's foot (such as dry, cracking, or itchy skin between the toes), you can try an over-the-counter medicine. These medicines can kill the fungus that causes athlete's foot. If the problem doesn't go away, talk to the person's doctor.
- Look every day for cuts or signs of infection, such as pain, swelling, redness, or warmth. If you see any of these signs—especially in a person who has diabetes—call the person's doctor.
- Don't trim or cut the cuticles. A minor cut in a cuticle could lead to an infection.

Adapted from Foot Care Tips to Help You Take Care of Your Feet for a Lifetime. NIH Publication No. 98-4285. The National Institutes of Health National Institute of Diabetes & Digestive & Kidney Diseases.

Healthwise Staff, **April 18, 2018**, Medical Review: **Kathleen Romito, MD - Family Medicine & Gayle E. Stauffer, RN - Registered Nurse**