

Getting to Know Your Feet Aging Feet

Aging is a normal part of life. Medical advances are making it possible to live longer and more productive lives. It is important to take care of your feet early in life so you will have healthy feet as you advance in age. Aging brings about changes in foot structure; feet spread out and lose their fat pads on the soles, therefore decreasing the cushion affect, nails become thicker and more brittle, and bones become more brittle from normal loss of calcium. Gender differences are also seen. Women have about four times as many foot problems with aging as men do.

According to the American Podiatry Medical Association, the human foot is “the mirror of health”. Illnesses that affect other body systems can show their signs and symptoms in the feet. Common systemic diseases that can be seen in the feet are diabetes, arthritis, and circulatory problems. Signs seen in the feet from these diseases include: dry, brittle nails, numbness and tingling, burning sensations, cold feeling feet, and color changes. It is important to have a daily foot care routine in order to pick up on any of these changes and promptly notify your health care provider to prevent long-term complications.

Keeping your feet healthy takes work. Following some simple tips will ensure that your feet remain in good health and continue to support an active lifestyle.

Tips for Maintaining Healthy Feet

Shoes and socks

- Wear properly fitting shoes. Make sure your foot fits comfortably inside the shoe and does not place pressure or cause undo rubbing against any part of the foot.
- Shop for shoes late in the afternoon since feet swell during the day.
- Wear shoes with a firm, non-skid sole and soft upper region.
- Avoid high heels and shoes with pointed toes.
- Do not wear pantyhose or stockings with a seam. The seam can rub against the feet and possibly cause a blister.
- Do not wear garters or constricting hose or socks.

Activity

- Walking is the best activity for your feet. Walking increases circulation as well as increases bone strength.

Grooming

- Examine your feet daily. Look for color and temperature changes, any cuts, blisters, corns, or calluses, swelling, redness, ingrown toenails, or any unusual changes.
- Wash your feet twice a day using a mild soap and lukewarm water. Dry well.
- Never attempt at-home removal of corns or calluses. Consult your health care provider for treatment recommendations.

- Trim toenails straight across to prevent ingrown toenails. Diabetics should have toenails trimmed by their health care provider.
- Visit your podiatrist or health care provider annually. When going to the doctor remove your shoes and socks. This tells the doctor foot health is important to you and should become a part of your overall physical examination.

Adapted for use in Kentucky from American Podiatry Medical Association (2008). Aging. Available online at <http://www.apma.org/s-apma/doc.asp?CID=371&DID=22505>.

This is a publication in an eight-part series on **Getting to Know Your Feet**. Other publications in this series are:

- Overview: HSW-PAR.820
- Common Foot Ailments: HSW-PAR.821
- Arthritis: HSW-PAR.823
- Diabetes: HSW-PAR.824
- Injuries: HSW-PAR.825
- Information for Women: HSW-PAR.826
- Walking for Health: HSW-PAR.827

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June 2008



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