

Ageing Feet

What problems are associated with ageing feet?

As we age, we naturally develop more problems with our feet due to normal daily wear and tear of joints, but also because the skin starts to become thin and loses its elasticity, as well as becoming dry and more fragile.

Foot pain can be debilitating. As we only have one pair of feet, it's important to take good care of them. Foot pain can also lead to issues with walking and exercising, which are an important part of health and wellbeing as we age. Additionally, if we have trouble with mobility, this can impact on getting out and about and involvement in social activities, which become ever more important as we get older.

As long as we take routine care of our feet, serious problems can usually be avoided. However, ageing can also mean that we develop other conditions, such as diabetes and arthritis, which in some cases can affect the foot and require treatment. Healing may also take longer.

What are the signs of ageing feet?

If good routine foot care is not practised, feet can start to show signs of ageing at any age, but generally it is most common from your fifties onwards.

General signs of ageing feet include more regular aches and pains, developing bunions, signs of clawing of the toes along with general circulatory problems.

What can I do to reduce the effects of ageing?

Painful and uncomfortable feet aren't a natural part of growing old or something to put up with. A lot can be done to improve comfort, relieve pain and maintain mobility.

Exercise

Keeping active and on the move helps to keep feet healthy. It tones up muscles, helps to strengthen arches and stimulates blood circulation.

General foot care and protection (also see leaflet on general foot care)

Keeping toenails cut and under control is key as nails that become too long can press against the end of the shoe causing soreness, infection and ulceration. Toenails that have been poorly cut can also become ingrown.

Additionally, checking your feet regularly, daily if necessary, and moisturising them (but not between the toes) will help to keep them supple as feet start to dry out and lose their natural oils

as they age. We also start to lose the fatty pads that cushion the bottom of the feet, and soles and heels become dry and nails brittle and more difficult to manage.

Keeping your feet warm is also important, but do not warm them too close to the fire! Warm stockings or socks can help, but avoid anything too tight which can restrict your circulation or cramp your toes. Wearing fleece-lined boots or shoes or even an extra pair of socks will also keep you warm but do make sure your shoes aren't tight as a result. Bed socks are also a good idea.

How to cut toe nails safely

Equipment needed to cut your own nails: Nail nippers / clippers and emery board



Before you start make sure that you have all the equipment easily to hand so that you do not have to stretch to reach anything. Also ensure that you are in a comfortable position - you may want to have your foot resting on a stool of suitable height.

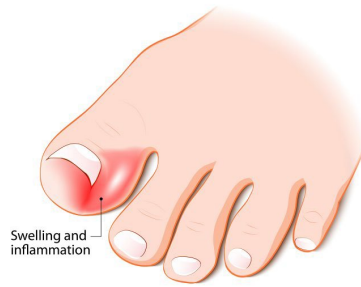
You may find it easier to cut your nails after a bath / shower or footbath when they will be slightly softer. Filing only is easier before you bathe or shower.

They should be cut straight across following the shape of your nail and not too short. Any thick nails or rough edges can be smoothed with an emery board.



Don't poke around the nail with any sharp instruments, only use a nail brush gently.

Toenails should never be cut too short as this may cause damage to the nail bed, and hence permanent damage to the nail. Don't be tempted to cut the nail too short just because you have made the effort to get down there!



The newly cut edge and any sharp corners of nails should be filed smooth. Always file away from your body in one direction only to avoid tearing the nail.

Never pull or tear your toenails because this will irritate the skin around and may leave a spike of nail to cut into the toe.

Thick toe nails that are difficult to cut, should be filed regularly instead. File right across the thickness of the nail and not just the edge.

Do not use any sharp instruments to clean around the nails, only use a nail brush / soft toothbrush after a bath or wash.

Do not cut the nail down at the sides to relieve an “ingrown” toenail, as this will worsen the condition in the long-term.

What types of footwear should I wear?

The older you get, the more important it is to wear a shoe that is comfortable, well-fitting and holds your foot firmly in place to give adequate support. Many people wear slippers if their feet are hurting but this can make things worse as slippers encourage you to shuffle rather than letting the joints work as they should. A pair of running shoes is the best option as these provide a degree of shock absorption and stability and also support the arch.

Avoid plastic easy-clean uppers, which don't allow the foot to breathe and won't stretch to accommodate your own foot shape.

Many shoes have cushioning or shock-absorbing soles to give you extra comfort while walking. When buying shoes, ensure that you can put them on and take them off easily. Check that the heel is held firmly in place: you'll find that a lace, strap, buckle or velcro-fastening shoe will give more support and comfort than a slip-on.

Your shoes should be roomy enough, particularly if you intend to wear them every day. If you suffer with swollen feet, it's a good idea to put your shoes on as soon as you wake up, before your feet have had a chance to swell.

Some useful tips when buying shoes

When buying shoes it may be helpful to consider the following points:-

- If possible, have your feet measured by a shoe-fitter., otherwise look for foot-shaped footwear

- Different makes of shoes will have slightly different fittings
- Adults feet can also change in size and shape with age.
- Buy shoes in the afternoon, as feet tend to swell throughout the day.
- Buy a shoe with a fastening
- REMEMBER Make sure you wear the right shoe for the job that you are asking your feet to do e.g. walking, running, dancing or resting

There are 4 main points to consider when buying shoes :-

Are they :-

- Long enough
- Deep enough
- Wide enough
- Round enough

Length

The length of your shoe is important. Allow at least 1 cm between the end of your longest toe and the front of the shoe. (Remember - your longest toe may not be your big toe)

Depth

Allow plenty of room over the top of all your toes - if you can see the toes bulging up in the shoe, then the shoes are too tight and may cause blisters or corns on the top of your toes.

Width

Allow plenty of width across the widest part of your foot and especially around the toes. (Court shoes and slip-on shoes are usually too small otherwise they would not stay on the foot)

Why a Shoe with a fastening?

Try to buy shoes with a fastening e.g. lace, buckle or Velcro. This will stop your foot sliding in the shoe which can cause pressure by the end of the day, or even the formation of hard skin on the sole of your foot.

Often people have one foot slightly larger than the other so always fit your largest foot. A fastening will help the shoe stay on the smaller foot.

What should the shoe be made of?

Natural fibre materials such as leather or suede are best for the upper of shoes as they are supple, absorb moisture and allow air to flow around the feet.

Microcellular or crepe soles are much better than leather for the sole of a shoe as they help to cushion the feet.

What types of Skin Types are there?

Moist Skin / Sweaty Feet

Sweating is a normal process, and we can lose up to a teaspoonful of sweat from our feet each day!

- Wash your feet daily with a mild soap and warm water
- Use socks or tights made from natural fibres such as cotton or wool and avoid man made materials when possible.
- Change socks daily and when possible, change shoes so you are not wearing the same pair each day
- For moist skin in-between the toes, this can be treated by applying a little surgical spirit regularly using a cotton bud. Avoid using talcum powder in-between the toes as it retains moisture and gets clogged up making the skin too moist

Dry Skin

This is common and can occur to anyone but is worse with ageing, psoriasis, some medical conditions or due to the effect of some medications.

The skin can feel rough, itchy and tight or may crack or split / fissure.

- Use a moisturiser daily and rub in well all over the foot but not between the toes. Wipe off any excess

Hard Skin/ Calluses

Corns and callosities (hard skin) can develop for a variety of reasons. They can be quite thick and yellow in colour.

They will usually feel more comfortable if you use a pumice or rough skin file regularly (2-3 times a week). A moisturising cream should also be applied to the feet daily, all over the feet, but not in-between the toes.

If these measures do not help, then you should seek advice from a Chiropodist / Podiatrist (registered with the Health Professions Council) or GP. The 'corn cures' available from chemists contain acid to burn the skin; if they are wrongly applied, the surrounding skin can be damaged, so avoid using.

Verruca

Verrucae are plantar warts that commonly occur on the soles of the feet or around the toe area. They are caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), which is contagious through direct person-to-person contact. There are various forms of HPV, which all relate to various parts of the human body. They usually go away on their own but this may take months and in some case years

NB: East Sussex Health Care NHS Trust is not commissioned to treat Verrucae; this will need to be carried out by a private Chiropodist / Podiatrist (registered with the Health

Professions Council), please access The Royal College of Podiatry Website for details of private practitioners in your area. <https://cop.org.uk/find-a-podiatrist#FIND.PODIATRIST>

For more information

If you require any assistance, then please contact Podiatry services on 0300 1314536

Or email

Esh-tr.podiatryenquiries@nhs.net

Sources of information.

East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust <https://www.esht.nhs.uk/service/podiatry/>

The Health and Care Professions Council www.hcpc-uk.org

The Royal College of Podiatry www.cop.uk

NHS choices www.nhs.uk

Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: 0300 131 4731 (direct dial) or by email at: esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net.

Hand hygiene

The Trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.

Tel: 0300 131 4500 Email: esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:
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The directorate group that have agreed this patient information leaflet:
Community Health & Integrated Care

Next review date: September 2025

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