



put your best foot forward!

Tips for Good Foot Health

The human foot holds 26 bones. That means combined, your feet contain one-quarter of all the bones in your body.

In the average lifetime, our feet will carry us approximately 115,000 miles.

“Our feet are bio-mechanical marvels,” shares **Nicholas Streit, DPM, a board-certified podiatrist at Dean Health System.** “And yet, we take our feet for granted.”

In fact, 75 percent of people will develop a foot problem in their lifetime that requires medical attention. According to Dr. Streit, the most common foot problems fall into one of these three categories:

- 1 Heel or arch pain
- 2 Deformities, such as hammertoes or bunions
- 3 Skin or nail conditions

Dr. Streit strongly encourages people not to ignore foot problems. “First of all, most of the common problems are very treatable, and we get great results! More importantly, though, certain systemic illnesses like diabetes can sometimes show up in your feet first.”

Heel or Arch Pain (Plantar Fasciitis)

Plantar Fasciitis is an inflammation of the ligaments that run through the arch of the foot. A ligament is a band that attaches bones to one another.

“In my own practice, heel and arch pain account for about 20% of all my patients,” Dr. Streit reports. “By far, it’s the most common thing I see.”

Plantar fasciitis is usually caused by overuse or some form of trauma to the foot. Other issues that contribute to the development of plantar fasciitis include:

- Genetic predisposition
- Having either a high arch or a low arch
- Inflexibility of the lower limb
- Type of shoes you wear
- Your level of activity

“One of the hallmark symptoms of plantar fasciitis is pain when first rising from a position

of rest,” says Dr. Streit. “That could mean rising from bed in the morning or rising from the couch after sitting for a while.”

TREATMENT & PREVENTION

If you have already developed plantar fasciitis, treatment includes:

- Icing
- Stretching the foot, calves, and hamstrings
- Anti-inflammatories
- Wear supportive shoes. Don’t go barefoot.
- Physical Therapy
- Over-the-counter arch supports (custom orthotics may be necessary in some cases)
- Surgery (The need for surgery is rare, but can be successful in chronic or extreme situations.)

The good news is it’s often possible to prevent plantar fasciitis altogether, as well as control chronic cases. Dr. Streit recommends wearing the right shoes for your activity. Avoid wearing flimsy sandals or shoes with little arch support. Going barefoot can take a toll on feet as well. He also suggests stretching your feet, calves, and hamstrings on a regular basis to maintain flexibility.

Deformities

Deformities are structural differences or changes to the foot. Two of the most common foot deformities are bunions and hammertoes.

A bunion occurs when the big toe is actually deviated. This can cause pressure points and often pain. Hammertoe is an abnormal bending in one or both joints of any of the four little toes. It is progressive in nature, and therefore should be caught and treated early. Neither condition will get better without intervention.

The conditions can be hereditary or could result from some sort of trauma or injury to the foot.

TREATMENT & PREVENTION

“There are basically two ways to deal with these conditions,” Dr. Streit explains. “You can change to shoes that fit better for the deformity. For patients who do not respond to shoe changes, surgery is an excellent option, but it’s best to try conservative treatment first.”

For bunions, wear a wider shoe with soft leather. For hammertoes, your shoe should be a little deeper and longer.

“If you can stop your shoe from rubbing or hitting the problem toe, you can minimize the pain,” he explains.

Infections of the Skin or Nail

Common skin and nail conditions include warts, athlete’s foot, toenail fungus, and in-grown toenails.

Warts are a benign, non-dangerous skin lesion caused by a virus. Athlete’s foot is a skin fungus. Toenail fungus typically presents as a thickening and yellowing of the nail. It can be painful or purely cosmetic. In-grown toenails occur when the nail grows into the skin and causes pain and sometimes infection.

TREATMENT & PREVENTION

While there are many over-the-counter remedies for these conditions, Dr. Streit suggests people consult their podiatrist to ensure proper care. Other conditions can sometimes mimic these simple problems. For example, psoriasis can be mistaken for toenail fungus. Your podiatrist can also handle these conditions once and often prevent future flare-ups. For example, people who suffer from chronic in-grown toenails can get fairly instant relief long-term from a procedure called onychoplasty, a corrective operation on the area where the nail rests. The success rate for preventing future problems approaches 97 percent.

The Bottom Line

“People don’t think of their feet as being that important,” says Dr. Streit. “But when your foot hurts, it impacts **all** of your daily activities. Podiatrists focus all our training, all our continuing education, all our practice and expertise on comprehensive foot care.

The podiatrists at Dean can help you put your best foot forward!”

If you would like more information about **foot health or the podiatrists** at Dean Health System, visit:

www.deancare.com