

## HEALTH

# 7 Ways to Take Care of Your Toes

NewsUSA

(NU) - Winter is hard on the feet. Not only are your feet confined to woolly socks and heavy boots, they also are more prone to infection.

Two of the most common ailments are fungal nails and ingrown toenails. According to the American Podiatric Medical Association, approximately 2.5 million people are treated each year for fungal infections of the toenails, and there may be millions of cases that go unreported.

A fungal infection takes hold underneath the surface of the nail, and is more prevalent during colder weather because heavy socks promote moisture. If moisture gets trapped under the nail, it can become stagnant and unhealthy — an ideal place for fungi to thrive. The first sign of infection is a change in the nail's color; it may have white markings or become a darker hue.

While some fungal infections can be treated with oral and topical medications, other cases may require a doctor's attention.

Ingrown toenails are those that have typically been trimmed improperly and whose corners or sides dig into the soft tissue of nail grooves, often leading to irritation, redness and swelling.

"It is important to remember to cut all toenails straight across when trimming so that they grow straight and not into the skin

around the toes," said Dr. Terri Walton, an APMA member.

To treat an ingrown nail, the APMA suggests immersing the foot in warm salt water, then applying an antiseptic and bandage to the area.

Follow these tips from the APMA to avoid infection and other foot problems this winter.

- Practice good hygiene. Like other parts of your body, your feet need special attention. Wash your feet with soap and water and dry them thoroughly.

- Change your shoes, socks and hosiery daily.

- Be kind to your feet. Properly fitting shoes are essential to good foot health. Most people wear shoes that are too tight, which can cause serious problems. Take the time to get your feet measured while shoe shopping and find the right fit.

- When possible, wear shower shoes in public showers.

- Use a quality foot powder. Talcum, not starch, will help deter infection.

- Avoid wearing tight hosiery, which promotes moisture.

- Wear socks made of synthetic fibers. They tend to wick away moisture faster. This is especially important when playing sports.

For more information on foot care, visit the APMA Web site at [www.apma.org](http://www.apma.org).