Getting Back to Basics for Your Feet

By: Edward Douglas Hutson, Jr., DPM
The human foot is a complex biological machine. The foot contains 26 bones, 33 joints, and more than 100 ligaments, tendons and muscles. All of these components work together to help our feet carry us through the daily activities of our life. If cared for properly it will carry us for a lifetime. The goal of this article will be to provide some general foot health information and discuss some common foot ailments.

Shoes should be considered the most important part of our wardrobe. Our entire body is supported by our feet and this is influenced by the shoes we place on them. This makes shoe selection and size an important consideration. A shoe with a wider and lower heel will provide more support and less chance of injury. The heel should be made with a shock absorbing material. The part of the shoe above the heel that grasps the heel of the foot is called the counter. It is important that your shoe has a firm heel counter that is reinforced with plastic. This is important as the heel counter helps to stabilize the position of the heel upon contact with the ground. It also helps prevent the foot from sliding up and down in the shoe when walking. The inside of the shoe should be smooth and free of heavy seams which could cause irritation. Shoe length should be one thumbs width from the tip of the longest toe to the tip of the shoe. Width of the shoe should match your foot width at the widest part of your forefoot while standing. Make sure to try on both shoes when buying new shoes. Buy shoes in the later afternoon. This is especially important in people with feet that swell. If you wear inserts or orthotics bring them with you. Wear the type of socks you anticipate wearing with the shoes when trying them on. Your shoes should feel comfortable when you try them on. Don’t count on them stretching to fit with time.

For daily foot care bathe your feet in lukewarm water with a mild soap. After bathing dry your feet including the space between your toes. If you have dry skin now is the time to moisturize your feet with a good quality over the counter moisturizer or one supplied by your Podiatrist. Never moisturize between your toes. Your feet provide enough moisture there and over moisturizing can cause the skin to be over moisturized leading to raw or irritated skin. Your nails should be trimmed regularly. Trim your nails straight across, slightly longer than the end of the toe. Keep your feet warm in cool weather.

Common Foot Ailments

**Athlete’s Foot**

This is a skin disease caused by a fungus. The problem usually starts between the toes but can involve the entire foot. Fungus likes a dark, damp and warm environment which your shoe provides. Signs of athlete’s foot include one or more of the following: itching, dry skin, inflammation, scaling, and blisters. Mild cases of athlete’s foot can be treated with a combination of over the counter anti fungal medication, keeping the feet dry by dusting foot powder in shoes, and frequently bathing the feet then thoroughly drying all areas around the toes. If the problem does not resolve after a 2 weeks of treatment contact your podiatrist for an accurate diagnosis and treatment plan.

**Blisters**

Blisters are caused by friction especially in the presence of moisture. Blisters are sterile underneath so do not pop them. Allow it to naturally resolve and keep it covered with a band aid or moleskin. If the blister does break, wash the area with soap and water apply antiseptic like Neosporin and a band aid.

**Bunions**

This is a condition which results from misalignment of the joint connecting the big toe to the foot. It is mostly an inherited condition but can be effected by outside factors also. Initial treatment for this condition would be wider shoes, padding.

**Calluses and corns**

These are caused by pressure and friction on the skin against boney areas or irregularities in shoes. Moleskin applied over these areas may provide some relief from the pain or burning that may accompany these lesions. Do not attempt to cut corns or calluses. Consult your podiatrist for treatment options.

**Foot Odor**

This is the result of hyperhidrosis (excessive foot perspiration). Vinegar and water soaks, antiperspirants, and foot powders may provide relief of odor. Also allow shoes to dry thoroughly between use. Moisture wicking socks are also available to pull the moisture away from the skin. You may also need to change your socks more than once a day.

**Heel Pain**
Heel pain is a very common problem that may have many causes. Poor shoes, Poor foot biomechanics resulting in plantar fasciitis, bruising, arthritis, gout or other systemic conditions. If icing, stretching and a good quality pair of jogging shoe do not provide relief consult your podiatrist.

Onychomycosis (Fungal nails)

Onychomycosis Causes thickening and discoloration of the nails. It can make the nails very difficult to trim as in the case above. There are three main categories of treatments for this condition: Topical medication, oral medication and Laser treatment. To date Oral medication in my experience seems to provide the best long term results. Again contact your podiatrist to discuss a treatment option that would be best for you.

Warts

Warts are caused by the human papilloma virus. They are contagious and like wet environments such as pools and showers. A good pair of flip flops or water shoes at public pools and showers can aid in prevention.

Warts can often be identified by the small black dots within the lesion as seen in the picture. These black dots are the blood supply to the wart. There will also be an absence of skin lines over the wart. As they get larger they can become more painful. If you suspect that you have warts consult your podiatrist.

These are just a few of the conditions that we as podiatrist see and treat on a regular basis. Patients that have poor circulation or diabetes should see a podiatrist at least once a year for an exam of their foot health. Remember, foot hygiene and a quality pair of shoes are time and money well spent. Foot pain is never normal. If your aches or pains do not resolve within a week or two go seek the help of a foot and ankle specialist, your Podiatrist.