Podiatry Fact Sheet: **Looking After Your Feet**

Good foot care increases your comfort, mobility, and independence; this information is intended to help you to help yourself and maintain your mobility and wellbeing.

Taking a few minutes each week can prevent longer term problems developing in the future.

**General Foot Care and Hygiene**

* Keep your feet active, wriggle your toes regularly, rotate your ankles and move them up and down. Keep walking regularly unless advised not to by a doctor or health care professional.
* Check your bare feet every day, especially if you:
	+ Have lost sensation in your feet.
	+ Have been diagnosed with poor circulation.
	+ Have diabetes.
* Check for cuts, blisters, and skin changes such as changes in skin colour or swelling.
* Use a mirror to check the soles of your feet or ask a friend or relative to help.
* Wash your feet daily with soap and warm water, dry your feet well, especially between your toes.
* Do not use talcum powder as a substitute for drying properly and avoid using medicated powders unless a health professional advises you to.
* Use a small amount of Surgical Spirit between toes for “sweaty feet” – don’t apply to broken skin. If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, check with your GP before using.
* Apply emollient/moisturiser over the tops, soles, and heels (not between the toes).
* Use a pumice stone or foot file to smooth down dry skin regularly (1-2 times a week when your feet are dry).
* Corn plasters and solutions available from Pharmacists contain chemicals and can cause damage if they are wrongly applied, so follow the guidance carefully or avoid using them.
* Wear clean hosiery and change them daily.
* Avoid hosiery that is tight around the leg, ankle, or toes.

**Nail Care**

* If you have mobility or balance issues always ensure you are in a safe position when cutting your toenails – for example, do not balance yourself on the edge of the bath.
* When cutting toenails, use nail clippers and never use scissors, do this after bathing when nails are softer.
* Cut nails straight across following the natural contour of your nail.
* Do not cut down at the sides – the corners of the nail should be visible.
* Do not cut nails too short – the free white edge at the end of the nail should still be visible.
* File any sharp or rough edges after you have finished cutting them.

* Routinely filing your nails when they are dry means they may not need cutting at all or at least less frequently. Use a long file to file over the end of the nails from the top of the nail downwards then finish by gently filing across them. If nails are thick, use the end of the clippers to cut very small pieces at a time.

When cutting your toenails NEVER -

* Cut your nails too short!
* Use a sharp instrument to clean the free edge or the nail grooves!
* Leave sharp corners!
* Cut a “V” in nails to “cure ingrowing toenails” – it does not work and can cause further problems.

## Thickened, Damaged, Deformed or Discoloured Nails

* A damaged, deformed, or discoloured nail can be managed by regular filing and correct cutting. Regular filing and cutting will reduce pressure problems in footwear.

## Fungal Nails

* A thickened nail could indicate a fungal infection. Even if a fungal infection is present, the nail can be left alone without treatment and just regularly filed. Be careful though as infection can spread to other nails or other family members if using the same nail cutting instruments.
* It’s a good idea to have a separate file for the infected nail(s). A fungal infected nail can increase your risk of athlete’s foot which is a fungal skin infection. There are treatments you can buy over the counter at the pharmacist. Tablets are the most effective form of treatment which can be prescribed by your GP.

**Callus and Corns**

* Daily application of a Heel balm to dry, hard skin on the bottom or borders of the feet can help reduce problems like painful build-up or splits in the skin.
* Footwear can cause a lot of the problems people associate with feet like corns and callus on toes.

# In growing toenails

* Ingrowing nails occur when the nail has been cut too short or down the sides leaving a sharp spike of nail. As the nail grows forward, this sharp piece of nail will dig into the skin at the side of the nail and eventually break the skin with resulting redness, pain, swelling and possible infection.
* Ingrowing toenails are more common if the toe box of your shoes is too tight as the toes press together and cause pressure on the sides or the nails. If your feet are regularly hot and sweaty and the skin is soft, it will be easier for the nail to penetrate the skin.
* In the early stages when the toe is inflamed bathe the foot in warm salty water. Do this for three to five minutes. This helps to reduce the inflammation (swelling). Dry the area carefully and apply a clean dressing over the toe (not round it as this can restrict blood flow). Do not attempt to cut the nail until the swelling has gone.

## Footwear

* Wear comfortable shoes that fit well, have an adjustable fastening, good cushioning, firm soles and a supportive back. You should avoid slip-on shoes and slippers.
* Check the insides of shoes for stones etc. before wearing them. Do not walk barefoot if possible.
* Footwear should have at least 1cm space at the end of your longest toe.
* It should be deep enough to allow room above your toes to prevent rubbing which can cause blisters and corns. It should be wide enough to accommodate the widest part of your foot.
* Avoid pointed toes on shoes as they crowd toes and can cause changes to foot shape over time.
* Protect your feet from extreme temperatures. Avoid putting them directly on hot water bottles/ radiators. Wear sandals on hot beaches. If you get cold feet, two thin pairs of socks are better than one thick pair.