

Beautifying your feet: Managing calluses, heel fissures, and wet, smelly feet.

Summer is coming and patients are already asking how to prepare their feet for sandal weather. Good foot care goes a long way in maintaining healthy feet despite your foot structure and genetic predisposition for hyperhidrosis and bromosis (wet and smelly feet).

Routine daily foot care includes washing your feet and toes with an antibacterial soap and a washcloth. Despite common thought, shower water with soap rushing over the tops of your feet does not count as a foot scrub. Dry your feet thoroughly and don't forget between the toes. This often neglected area sets up a wet environment for tinea pedis (athlete's foot), macerated painful web corns, and malodor. If you have difficulty drying between the toes, you may use a thin cotton cloth or gauze and slide it between the toes instead of a thick towel. Apply a moisturizing cream to your feet daily and thoroughly rub it in, especially between the toes.

Your shoes may be just one of the causes of calluses; the other is not wearing them. The majority of corns are caused by inappropriate shoes that look good but fit horribly. Be sure to wear shoes that fit the shape of your foot and are sized correctly. Backless shoes (clogs) with a ridge are notorious for causing heel fissures. And you should never wear shoes without socks. Wearing shoes without socks increases friction on the skin, increases the bacterial and fungal contamination in the shoe, and increases malodor and perspiration. Be sure that your socks also fit properly and be sure to leave extra space at the toes for dress socks and nylons. After all that has been said, do wear shoes. Shoes protect your feet from the environment. Persons who go barefoot most of the time, especially outside, have lots of diffuse callosities on their feet due to the skin's response to protect it from the harsh environment. As for the diabetic population, diabetics should never wear sandals or go barefoot, due to increased risk of ulcerations and puncture wounds, related to lack of sensation.

Calluses, corns, and heel fissures or cracks can be managed at home with daily care or may need a podiatric evaluation and treatment if more severe. Mild to moderate calluses and heel fissures can be reduced with the daily use of a pumice stone or a heel file. Do not use a knife or scissors to cut your calluses off. You can seriously hurt yourself and can cause an infection. If your calluses and fissures are deep and painful, a podiatrist can provide initial reduction with the use of a keratinolytic agent and possibly a prescription designed to reduce keratin build up. Consistency of daily care is necessary for satisfactory results and to maintain your calluses. Specialty creams that are specific for callus reduction can be obtained from your podiatrist.

Hyperhidrosis and Bromosis are embarrassing to those who live with this disorder. I'm not referring to the normal perspiration that may require you to change your socks daily and expresses a little foot odor, I'm referring to those who have to change their socks 2-3 times a day and can clear a room by taking their shoe off. These feet are significantly more prone to athlete's foot, nail fungus infections, and plantar warts. Mild cases can be treated by daily antibacterial washes, changing socks regularly, and using an antiperspirant spray to their feet. For moderate to severe cases, there are prescription medications available to reduce perspiration and malodor.

A few final comments on nail care. Chronic use of nail polish can produce a thin, shiny, yellow discoloration to the nail plate. The solution is to take a break from using nail polish. Always cut and file your nails smooth, do not pull and yank the nail off. This can cause ingrown toenails, hangnails, and ripping into the nail bed. Thickened or discolored nails should be evaluated for nail fungus early, as treatments that are available now are extremely effective when used early in the infective process.