

Best foot forward

Steps to take for healthy feet

by JENN DAWSON

It's time to reveal our tender, winter-shy tootsies for another season of sun, sandals and summer activity. So take off your socks, stretch your toes, and have a good look. Any cracks? What about warts, corns or fungus? Pay attention to how your feet feel (and smell!).

After a winter of hiding our feet in boots and shoes, summer is a perfect time to assess the health of our feet, says Neil Naftolin, a Toronto podiatrist and a past president of the Ontario Podiatric Medical Association. "People get their teeth and eyes checked, but most don't realize that 80% of Canadians will at some point have a foot problem that requires medical attention."

The aesthetics of our feet are often what pushes us to take action, but don't stop at the pumice-and-polish pedicure. "Many foot problems can be prevented or cured if you see a podiatrist," Naftolin says. "Most people self-diagnose and self-treat, but what you think is a callus might actually be a wart, and there's a reason why the seven pairs of shoes you bought to prevent friction aren't really doing any good." (To find a podiatrist near you, check out www.podiatrycanada.org.)

Not surprisingly, having your feet checked by a specialist is at the top of Naftolin's summer foot care list. Here's more seasonal advice.

Wear proper shoes

Sexy sling backs and flip-flops are fine occasionally, but it pays to invest in a pair of sturdy, orthopedic sandals for daily use. (And orthopedic doesn't have to mean ugly—many high-support summer shoes are funky fashion finds.) Check the fit of all your shoes, as foot size can change over time, and be sure to replace your shoes regularly. "Shoes aren't like blue jeans," cautions Naftolin. "It may be time to get rid



of the old favourites." To get an accurate fit, shop for shoes in the late afternoon, when your feet are likely to be most swollen.

Go barefoot with caution

Especially on the beach. If you have fallen arches or suffer from heel pain, feeling the sand between your toes can really hurt. Instead, wear good sandals or running shoes.

Apply sunscreen

One of the most painful sunburns you can get is on the thin, sensitive skin on the top of your feet.

Manage moisture

Excess moisture breeds bacteria, encourages fungal growth, and is the prime suspect in smelly feet. In hot weather, feet need to breathe. Sandals will give you plenty of breathing room, but so will leather shoes, as long as they aren't too heavy or tight. When it comes to socks, opt for cotton or high-performance synthetic varieties that will keep your feet cool and dry. Applying foot powder will help absorb excess moisture.

Pamper your feet

Wash your feet frequently and dry them carefully, especially between the toes. Care for cracked skin, and be careful to trim toenails straight across. If you're getting a professional pedicure, be sure to ask how the instruments and pedicure tubs are cleaned to avoid exposure to bacteria.

Take special precautions if you have diabetes or poor circulation. Treat common foot ailments like corns, calluses and warts with care, Naftolin warns, as over-the-counter remedies are usually acids that can burn skin and may be dangerous for those with circulatory disorders and diabetes. People with diabetes are especially prone to foot problems and need to take extra precautions, such as not walking barefoot on hot sand or asphalt and keeping an eye out for cuts and splinters that could develop into infections.

"Take a few precautions this summer," Naftolin advises, "and you'll avoid the agony of 'de-feet'." Kind of corny, maybe, but it's advice worth walking away with. **THJ**