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Editor, Janis Merrell
GoodLife@LifePathMA.org
(413) 773-5555 x2255

THE GOOD LIFE

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Step Into Summer on Healthy Feet



Dr. Kate Clayton-Jones, PhD, RN, CFCN, and the founder of FootCare by Nurses

It should go without saying that men need foot care as much as women do, but it is sometimes harder to convince them. Most women have some history of foot care, like a spa pedicure, and it isn't a great leap for them to embrace more comprehensive evidence-based footcare, especially as they get older or if they have an injury or a condition that makes self-care challenging.

On the other hand, the majority of men just clip their own nails on occasion, until they can't. One man who comes to our office in Greenfield developed a form of rheumatoid arthritis that made it impossible for him to reach his feet. The condition of his nails deteriorated until he was embarrassed by the appearance of his thick, curving toenails. What he did not realize is that his nails and feet were not just unattractive, they were also hindering his ability to walk and negatively affecting his balance and desire to do anything but necessary walking. Not being diabetic, he wasn't able to access podiatry services. Without exercise he gained weight and his rheumatoid pain increased from the lack of movement—and his story is not unique.

This man, who'd never had a pedicure, walked out of the office happy and in comfort.

This gentleman's story is why FootCare by Nurses came into existence. This man needed help taking care of his feet, but it wasn't a medical emergency. To us, this is skilled nursing work. On his first visit we trimmed his nails, thinned his thick calluses, performed some gentle range of motion work which then allowed his toes to flex and provided him a better connection to his feet and therefore firmer footing. We also showed him how to tie his shoes for a more secure fit and applied skin-friendly oils into his dry skin. This man, who'd never had a pedicure, walked out of the office happy and in comfort. He was no longer ashamed of his feet, and he felt that the nurse had taken care of him, not just his feet. He now comes once a month for a maintenance visit. He is walking about two miles a day and the combination of good medical management by his physician, good foot care, and regular exercise are helping his health, weight, and outlook on life. He now understands that comprehensive foot care is an investment in health and well-being, a way to walk without pain, sustain balance, and prevent the complicated and expensive injuries associated with falls.

Feet take a beating every day of our lives, and most people don't think about them unless they hurt. A memoir from an author, who worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City for seven years, noted that the hardest part of his job was sore feet. Not the challenge

of guarding priceless art or the hassle of managing crowds, but his feet, exhausted from standing on a marble floor for hours, often made him miserable. If he'd had access to a trained foot care nurse, he might have chosen different shoes, fastened them more securely, and put on graduated compression that kept his feet comfortable. The book is entitled, *All the Beauty in the World*, and the author Patrick Bringley, now writes for the *New Yorker* where I'm sure he spends less time on his feet.

We are used to reading about foot problems in women caused by high heels and pointy-toed shoes. Fashion has dictated painful shoe choices, and women have largely been affected, but not solely. Men's thin-soled dress shoes and non-absorbent socks have had an impact on the condition of their feet, and many men were required to wear dress shoes at work. Men can have bunions, calluses, and hammer toes, too. If they are runners or bikers, they often have bruised toes (which are not normal and are preventable). No matter what you are doing, feet and toes do not have to hurt.

Prevention is key. Last fall when I volunteered at Monte's March Against Hunger, I treated a number of walkers who'd developed blisters from shoes that weren't fitting properly and socks that had bunched up and caused irritation. The blisters could have been prevented with better sock and shoe choices. Socks are supposed to fit well. Feet should not slip around in shoes even if they are sandals or flip flops.

Getting a spring tune-up for your feet can help you joyfully join in summer activities, be it walking or playing with the kids in the pool.

There is an art to fitting sandals:

1. Determine the intended function for the sandal: Is it a wedding sandal? A water sandal? A hiking sandal? Pick the sandal that meets the function. Match the pattern of your foot, to the pattern of the sandal. With your heel in the back of the shoe, the widest part of your foot should fit in the widest part of the shoe. If the pattern does not fit, the shoe will never fit you well.
2. The straps are what hold the shoe onto your foot. They should feel snug, and your foot should not slide around in the shoe. Sliding will give you blisters and calluses. You know you have it right when you lift your heel, and the heel of your shoe does not separate from your foot. A flip flop that fits will not flop. And when a shoe doesn't flop (i.e., it is secured to your foot), you won't have to grip with your toes to hold the shoe on. Toes were never designed to hold on shoes, they are designed for balance.
3. If you feel pain wearing your sandals, stop and adjust. A sandal that fits you is one that you feel that you could comfortably run in.
4. Length: Heels and toes should not hang over the length of the sandal, about a half-inch beyond the longest toe to the front of the sandal is the standard recommendation.

At FootCare by Nurses, we restore beauty and comfort to well-loved feet. We help a lot of people feel very proud of their feet in their sandals.