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THE GOOD LIFE

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Regular Foot Care Is a Necessity

By Dr. Kate Clayton-Jones, PhD, DNP,
Founder of FootCare by Nurses



Dr. Kate Clayton-Jones

I have a colleague whose mother prefers a spa pedicure to a visit with a foot care nurse. She says, “The nail polish makes me feel pretty.” The soaking and scented lotions make her feel pampered, and she has enough medical appointments

already, so she would prefer this one luxury to not feel like a medical necessity. She also shares that while she knows that a trained foot care nurse or podiatrist can spot problems and prevent further complications, she doesn’t think there are any concerning issues, and she is happy to pay to be pampered.

Beauty is always in the eye of the beholder. Some people like color, some like sheen, some don’t mind a more rugged or unkempt look. Onlookers may have different opinions, and sometimes those opinions and judgments can bring shame and embarrassment, especially when it’s hard to care for yourself. When COVID ended, I saw many neglected feet with long twisted toenails. Sadly, these patients were embarrassed and apologetic. It was an honor to help restore their self-respect and comfort.

I find it interesting to think of the ways that self-respect and vanity can overlap. My colleague’s mother, who doesn’t think she needs a foot care nurse, has a healthy amount of self-respect, stays physically active, and is taking care of herself. She is adamant that it’s her body and her choice and I agree. I wish she understood that this is not an either/or situation. Good proactive foot care can entail both, and this is relevant to all people, though spa pedicures are less common among men. Many men that I know are content to care for their own feet until they can’t reach them or deal with thickened nails, whereas many women develop the habit of spa pedicures from early adulthood on.

A spa pedicure is super common and mostly does the job of beautifying the foot. However, covering up problems and ignoring an issue is not a healthy long-term solution. Cracked heels and callouses that constantly need attention are a symptom of an underlying cause. Often the cause is preventable, but the nail salon workers are not trained in clinical assessment. Thick toenails can be painted over, but there is a reason they are thick. Often thick nails are also fungal, but not always; they are commonly misdiagnosed and wrongly treated. Pain in the toes, feet, ankles, hips, knees, legs, back, and even in the shoulders and the head can be directly related to

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how feet are operating and functioning. A beautifully trimmed and polished set of toenails might make the foot look pretty, but the pain and discomfort of the foot does not a happy or active person make.

Foot function is a vital component of the lymphatic and cardiac pumping systems. Feet and toes also contain thousands of sensors that are important for knowing where our bodies are in the world. They help us balance and prevent falls. Functioning feet are an important component of cognitive health. Comfortable feet allow people to walk, socialize, and avoid isolation that can lead to cognitive decline. This is why beauty and function need to be combined. While the beauty salon/spa pedicure is a treat, the functioning component of caring for your feet ought to feel like a thorough visit to a good mechanic.

A nurse trained in evidence-based foot care will ask if there is any pain and listen carefully. During an assessment, that nurse is also silently asking some important questions the patient may not be able to answer. Do the shoes fit properly? How is the health of the skin? Are the nails functioning as shields to protect the sensors and to optimize fluid flow? Do all

the parts move comfortably? Is the leg heavy or light? Is there freedom of motion? How are the pulses, the color, the tone? Feet reflect and manifest tension, and tension comes from many different avenues. A professional foot checkup doesn’t take long, but it does get “under the hood” and should provide answers and direction.

Whether a person requires a home visit or prefers to come to the office, a foot examination

is not invasive and provides peace of mind and increased comfort. Often people don’t realize how much their untrimmed nails were affecting the fit of their shoes, or they have accepted corns and callouses as an unfortunate part of life. It gives me and the nurses I work with great joy to feel a patient relax, smile, and leave feeling great with a better understanding of how their feet work and what they need to optimize the efficiency of their feet.

Warm weather has arrived and people who have been cooped up all winter are anxious to get out into fresh air and sunshine. Before painting your toenails a pretty color and slipping into sandals, get your feet checked out, soak them in apple cider vinegar if it’s recommended, and massage some coconut oil into your skin. Before hiking on local trails, be sure your boots aren’t going to give you blisters and choose moisture-wicking socks (merino wool) that will not bunch and rub. If you are walking for a cause on hard pavement, roll your ankles, wiggle your toes, and give yourself a foot massage before and after the event. Whenever possible, let your feet connect to the earth directly. Take your shoes off and feel the earth, grass, or sand. With or without polish, well-tended, healthy feet will reward you with comfort and a feeling of well-being.



On Monday, June 8, visitors to the Joyful Expressions! and Community Sing event at LifePath joined Choral Director Joe Toritto in song, while professional artist Debra Cootware demonstrated an art session similar to the ones that encouraged older adults to produce the beautiful art on display. The event culminated with ice cream sundaes.

The multi-media exhibits displayed artwork created during a series of art sessions LifePath has been bringing to older adults across Franklin County—at Elm Terrace in Greenfield, Highland Village in Shelburne, and Sanderson Place in Sunderland, as well as at LifePath’s own Community Engagement Center (CEC) in Greenfield. These sessions were made possible in part through a grant from the Mass Cultural Council.