

## Introduction

**Taking care** of your feet and nails is as important as looking after any other part of your body. Problems with your feet can lead to other conditions developing so make sure to make foot health top of your list. An important point to remember is that developing foot and nail conditions such as athlete's foot is not a sign of poor foot hygiene so never feel embarrassed about it.

Considering the average adult takes approximately 10,000 steps a day, feet come under an enormous amount of pressure and stress, so some light relief is a must. Your feet and nails should be rubbed, soaked, moisturised, filed, and generally spoiled!

The old adage, 'my feet are killing me!' is becoming more common as people juggle hectic careers and fast paced social lives, with a sporting pursuit often thrown in for good measure. All the while, their sole dependents, carrying them through it all, are left unattended apart from an occasional footsie under the dinner table, - it's hardly fair!

This leaflet will introduce you to some practical foot and nail care advice and everyday tips which will leave your feet feeling fabulous. The guide will also introduce you to foot health, including recognising the symptoms of unhealthy feet and nails and talking to your doctor about these health issues.

**Let's hope** that this leaflet is a positive first step in helping you achieve beautiful, healthy feet and nails!

## Treat your feet!

**Some TLC** goes a long way, and if this rule is applied to foot and nail care, you will be surprised at how much better your feet will look and feel. Why not try some of the following healthy foot and nail tips;

-  Wash your feet every day and dry them thoroughly, especially between the toes
-  If the skin is dry, use a little moisturiser, but not between the toes as you don't want a build-up of moisture
-  Essential oils can provide soothing relief for tired feet
-  Gently remove hard skin with a pumice stone or foot file. If this proves painful, consult with a podiatrist or chiropodist
-  Trim nails regularly, straight across, using proper nail clippers. Jagged edges and/or nails cut down the sides can lead to ingrown toe nails which can be very painful
-  Have your feet massaged regularly if you can
-  If you experience any problems with your feet and nails, consult with a GP or podiatrist as the problem can be easily treated

### Foot Fact!

Your feet mirror your general health. Did you know that conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, nerve and circulatory disorders can show their initial symptoms in the feet? It might be helpful to remember this and if you ever have a foot problem consult with your GP or podiatrist just to make sure everything is ok!

## Who else can help you help your feet?

### Podiatrist

Your local podiatrist, also known as a chiropodist, are professionals who specialise in lower limb and foot health.

They play a key role in education, prevention and treatment of dry, cracked and hard skin, skin and nail infections, joint pains and verrucae, heel pain and bio-mechanical disorders.

They can also advise you on how to look after your feet at home.



### GP

Some foot and nail conditions such as fungal nail infections may require a prescription that only a GP can provide.

Therefore it may also be necessary to visit your GP as part of your foot health routine.

### Pharmacist

Your local pharmacist will be able to advise you on a number of products available to buy over the counter to treat various foot problems.

## What is a fungal nail infection?

A **fungal nail infection**, also known as onychomycosis (on-ih-ko-my-KO-sis), makes nails appear thick, discoloured, or brittle. The infection begins when living fungus gets under the nail and continues living there – deep down, where the nail starts to grow. A fungal nail infection will not go away on its own. In fact, it is highly contagious and can spread to other parts of the body. However, with the right treatment a fungal nail infection will go away permanently.

A fungal nail infection is not a cause of poor hygiene. Instead, it can be the result of age, a medical condition such as diabetes, sweaty feet or possibly an infection picked up from a gym or swimming pool.

### Symptoms of fungal nail infections include;

-  Nails that look different
-  Discoloured nails that may be brownish, yellowish, or with little white patches
-  Nails that are flaky or brittle on the surface  
Thick nails that may be hard to trim
-  A foul smell resulting from debris collected under the nail
-  Painful nails

Some people who are prone to fungal nail infections include outdoor workers, sports people and the elderly. Fungal nail infections are contagious so you should always take precautions like wearing protective footwear in swimming pools and showers where infections are easily spread.

If you suspect you have a fungal nail infection, have discoloured nails or any of the symptoms mentioned above, talk with your GP or podiatrist about treatment options, or see [www.nailcare.ie](http://www.nailcare.ie)

## Talking to a health professional about fungal nail infections

Some of the information that a health professional such as a GP or podiatrist may need to know is;

- How long your nails have displayed signs of fungal nail infection?
- Have you had a fungal nail infection before?
- Have you ever taken treatment for it?
- Are you currently on any other medication?

Questions you may want to ask include;

- What does a fungal nail infection look like?
- What treatments are available?
- What will treatment involve?
- When will my nails look normal again?
- How can I prevent the infection coming back?

### Treating a fungal nail infection

A fungal nail infection can be difficult to treat as it lives deep under the nail bed. Some people unsuccessfully try creams and other surface treatments on their own as well as home remedies. Some even remove the nail. But none of these can kill the infection.

A prescription treatment is available from your GP which effectively treats fungal nail infections.

As the fungus that causes the infection has been present for quite a while it will take a number of months to restore your nail to its natural condition but the final results are worth it!

## Taking care of your feet at home

1. Trim toenails with either a nail scissors or a nail clipper. Always cut straight across, to avoid developing ingrown toenails.
2. Using an emery board, smooth the edges of the nail.
3. Soak your feet in warm water with some Epsom salts, bubble bath or essential oils. After letting your feet soak for 5 – 10 minutes, scrub your foot thoroughly all over.
4. Hard spots like the heel, sole and ball of the foot need special attention. Use a pumice stone or friction pad on these places.
5. Rub some cuticle cream into the base of each nail and massage in gently.
6. Rinse your foot in the water and towel dry. Be sure to dry between the toes.
7. Rub moisturising cream into the feet. Remember not to moisturise in between the toes! Be as liberal as you want with the moisturiser as the soles of the feet will need a lot of cream.
8. While massaging your feet, rotate your ankle and pull your toes to loosen them.

### Foot Fact!

The average person walks around 130,000 kilometres in their lifetime, equivalent to walking around the world 3 times!

### Foot Fact!

Each foot has 26 bones, 33 joints and 107 ligaments. There are approximately 250,000 sweat glands in a pair of feet, and they excrete as much as half a pint of moisture each day

### Foot Fact!

Shopping for shoes is best done in the afternoon. Your feet tend to swell a little during the day, and it's best to buy shoes to fit them then. Have your feet measured every time you purchase shoes, and do it while you're standing. When you try on shoes, try them on both feet; many people have one foot larger than the other, and it's best to fit the larger one

### Foot Fact!

People with diabetes are especially vulnerable to serious foot problems because of the reduced circulation and diminished sensitivity to foot pain which often accompanies diabetes. If not properly cared for, even small problems like cuts or cracks can develop into more serious conditions

## Neat Feet

A practical guide to taking care of your feet and nails

