

# Older and Wiser: Let's talk about how important it is to take care of our feet

We're all doing a lot more walking these days. Foot care is essential to maintaining strong overall health.

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*An older couple walking their dog through a park. It may sound simple, but it's essential to take good care of our feet, especially as we grow older. Getty Images*

I recently received an email from a couple who needed help with foot care.

Though this couple is able to drive and walk, they had trouble cutting their toenails. A friend of mine remembered, as a younger person, reading a scene in a Kingsley Amis novel where some older men were discussing their inability to trim their own toenails, and in one case no longer being able to even see his toes. At the time my friend wondered, will my life ever come to this?

I remembered back to a time when I ran a seniors centre downtown and the lineup for the podiatrist who came in once a month filled the entire lobby. It occurred to me that perhaps healthy and pain-free feet were especially important to maintaining healthy living.

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, “three out of four people develop serious foot problems as they age – putting their independence and well-being at risk.”

Healthy and pain-free feet are helpful in maintaining good balance, keeping you active and giving you advanced warning signs of other issues.

The health agency also states that healthy and pain-free feet help you keep your balance which is important in preventing falls – and falling, of course, is a major risk factor in seniors health and well-being.

The Health Canada’s website states: “Falls are the leading cause of injury among older Canadians, the cause of 85 per cent of seniors’ injury-related hospitalizations and 50 per cent of all falls causing hospitalization happen at home while people are doing their usual daily activities.”

Staying active is key to aging well. It is said that in our lifetime, we may average well over 150,000 kilometres and healthy feet are crucial for that activity. Walking is the perfect exercise for keeping our weight down, preventing blood clots and keeping our bones and muscles strong. Walking is free and, despite COVID-19 restrictions, can be done in your own neighbourhood, at the mall and on our beautiful North Shore trails and walkways.

The Canadian health agency also states that, “Keeping an eye on your feet can even give you an early warning about serious health problems such as diabetes, arthritis, nerve damage and poor blood circulation.” Many of these issues can manifest in the feet first.

## Putting Your Foot Down

But what are some practical steps to good foot care?

Check your feet regularly: a daily routine of checking your feet is as important as practising good oral hygiene. Make sure to get your doctor to check your feet if you have things like cuts, sores, ingrown or infected toenails, dry cracked skin or swelling or you feel that something is wrong with your foot alignment.

Keep blood circulating to your feet as much as possible: put your feet up when you are sitting or lying down, stretch if you have had to sit for a long while, have a gentle foot massage or take a warm foot bath.

Wear comfortable and well-fitting shoes with good traction as your choice of shoe can do a lot to keep your feet as healthy as possible, especially if you have diabetes or arthritis. They can also help to prevent possible infections. Shoes that are too small can cause bunions, blisters, and ulcers. Also, research shows wearing shoes (inside and outside) is your best protection against falls.

Avoid exposing your feet to cold temperatures and do not sit for long periods. Do not smoke because that can decrease blood supply and increases the chance of swelling and other circulatory problems.

Finally, the Canadian health agency suggests that you take good care of your toenails. If you do not deal with your toenails regularly, you may experience problems fitting into your shoes which may make walking difficult. Or you could develop infections like ingrown toenails, nail fungus and athlete's foot. PHA says "Cut or file your nails regularly with appropriate nail care tools. Trim them straight across and never shorter than the end of your toe".

If you cannot cut or file your toenails have a friend assist you or look for a service to help you with all your foot-care needs. To find a service you could call BC NurseLine at 1-866-215-4700, check with your health-care provider, or dial 2-1-1 for BC211 information services.

Unhealthy feet and ongoing foot pain can prevent you from enjoying your life and staying active, but it does not have to be an inevitable part of aging. You may not be able to see your feet and cut your toenails – but there are solutions.

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