

Best foot forward

With an estimated population of nearly 60m, the NHS in the UK has approximately 120m feet to think about when considering its future health care forecasts. Feet are generally the most used and yet widely ignored part of the body - abused by poor-fitting shoes and high demands / expectations.

Incredibly, a quarter of all the bones of the body are in the feet. As well as this, there are 33 joints, 107 ligaments, 19 muscles and an amazing 125,000 sweat glands that have the ability to produce up to quarter of a pint of moisture a day!

When was the last time that you had a good look at your feet?

As the first signs of ill health are often seen in the feet, it is important not to neglect them. They're an excellent mirror of general health. But as they are located at the furthest point from our sight they are often ignored.

Many factors affect the condition of the feet but the most widely known problems arise from badly fitted shoes. Cramped conditions can lead to bunions and corns and rubbing to blisters. Poor hygiene can cause foot odour, infections in broken skin and encourage growth of fungal infections, such as athlete's foot. Cleaning them regularly and placing in well-fitted shoes are all common sense practices that are often neglected. Exercise is also excellent for the feet as it improves the circulation in that area and throughout the body.

Crucially, caring for our feet could lead to the early detection of many conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, nerve and circulatory disorders. Diabetics especially have to look after their feet to a greater degree *once* they have been diagnosed because of the nature of their condition. Diabetics can soon develop infections from common complaints such as corns and other such foot complaints. This is due to damaged nerves preventing the relay to the brain of damage to the body. Without prompt intervention and scrupulous cleanliness these minor problems can soon become infected and become a major health risk. As well as damaged nerves (caused by high levels of blood sugar) poor blood flow makes it harder for a sore or infection to heal (peripheral vascular disease). And even the cleaning of feet has to be carefully executed. Water should be tested by the elbow to test the temperature and dried thoroughly after bathing.

On a daily basis, each foot should be inspected for problems such as sores and blisters. The toenails should be cut once a week - best done after the feet have been washed, as the nails are softer. And, wearing shoes or slippers should be routine because of the inability to detect injury from standing on objects lying on the floor, due to nerve damage.

Feet are important for other aspects of well being

Reflexologists treat the body by applying pressure to certain parts of the foot. Zones on the feet correspond to various parts of the body, bringing relief to a host of conditions and illnesses.

Anyone that enjoys being massaged will know that the feet are an excellent choice for not only relaxing but also exciting the whole body. Take time to pamper them – did you know that feet are classed as an erogenous zone?

We can all benefit from looking after our feet. With as many as 80% of people likely to encounter some foot problem or another during a lifetime, it is well worth making the effort. Noting the condition of your feet can alert you of medical problems that are brewing elsewhere in the body. Early detection can result in early treatment. Advanced warnings such as these can avoid greater medical intervention than if the symptoms are left unchecked.

Take the first steps towards looking after your health – look after your feet.

References:

www.podiatrysa.net.au

www.canoe.ca

www.niddk.nih.gov

www.foot.com