

Smart steps for healthy feet

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(HealthDay)—Are your feet something you think about only when they hurt? Simple steps can protect them from common problems, some of which are hard to get rid of.

The first step is to wear shoes, such as water slip-ons, in moist environments like indoor swimming pools and communal showers at the gym. Damp areas allow bacteria and viruses to thrive, and walking barefoot makes you more susceptible to common infections like nail fungus, athlete's foot and warts.

You don't have to give up style, but skip shoes that don't feel comfortable from the moment you try them on. Calluses, corns, blisters and irritations can all result from or get worse from shoes that pinch and don't fit well. It's a mistake to expect that the shoes will "give" and feel better over time.

Choose hosiery with care. That means buying socks and tights made from breathable fabrics. It's not always possible to wear cotton, so if your feet get sweaty when you wear hosiery made of synthetics like nylon, take these steps: Carefully wash and dry feet when you get home, hand-wash the hosiery every night and let shoes dry out before you wear them again—you may need to wait 48 hours.

A pedicure might be a great treat for your feet, but beware of harmful practices, both at salons and at home. It's OK to gently slough off dead skin cells with a pumice stone after soaking your feet, but tools with [razor blades](#) are dangerous.

Cutting cuticles is also unsafe. Gently push them back with an orange wood stick. To prevent [ingrown toenails](#), clip straight across, not in a curve. The edges should be just a few millimeters shy of the toe tips. Use an emery board to smooth any ragged spots straight across.

If you're concerned about any changes in your [feet](#), promptly contact your doctor or a podiatrist for an evaluation.

More information: The American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle

Society has more about ways to [protect and care for your feet](#).

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