

Proper foot hygiene is key for 'Happy Feet' this summer

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As warmer temperatures approach, in the midst of getting your beach body ready, don't forget to take care of your feet, said Dr. Ronald Lepow, a podiatrist and assistant professor of orthopedic surgery at Baylor College of Medicine.

Fungal infections of the skin and nails are common issues that he sees in his practice, Lepow said. In women, it is mostly due to visiting [nail salons](#) that are not using proper hygienic methods to clean their tools and equipment. In men, it's commonly seen due to contamination from the gym, pool or walking barefoot outside. Lepow said these infections are very contagious.

Another cause of these fungal infections is excessive dampness or sweating in the feet, which can cause bacteria to develop. To limit excess perspiration, Lepow recommends wearing socks with a good wicking factor that will help get rid of dampness better than a cotton sock and using foot powders or topical prescription medications.

Visual clues are important in recognizing [fungal infections](#) in the feet, Lepow said. If the skin on the foot is red, scaly, cracking or burning, it indicates that there could be athlete's foot. If toenails turn a different color, are brittle or a dark color emerges under the nail, it indicates that there is an issue.

He recommended that those with skin or nail conditions on the feet should not wear synthetic shoes – the rubber or plastic does not breathe. He suggests wearing moisture-wicking socks and leather shoes that help the feet breathe. Avoiding wearing the same shoes every day also can be helpful, as is using shoe trees to dry out shoes every day.

If left unattended, the problems can get worse – not only cosmetically, but also because of the risk of a [secondary bacterial infection](#). This can happen between the toes and can result in treatment using antibiotics.

Proper maintenance can help avoid these issues, including buying a foot powder or soaking feet in a solution, such as Epsom salt, to dry them out. Lepow said that bathing daily and drying the feet properly – especially between the toes – can also help avoid problems.

If things do not improve after all of these efforts, it may be time to see a podiatrist, according to Lepow.

As sandal season approaches, Lepow warns advises to be cautious about what your [feet](#) are exposed to in sandals and flip-flops.

"Flip-flops and sandals keep you cool in the warmer months, but keep in mind how much dirt and grime you pick up," said Lepow.

In the warm summer months, Lepow said that there is an increase in warts in children. Warts, which are caused by HPV, are [viral infections](#) that can be picked up from dirt and grime in the street. They can be contracted through barefoot exposure to the virus, which means they are also often spread in showers, gyms, pools and other areas where barefoot walking is common. There are many over-the-counter medications that can be used for treating warts, but an unresponsive wart on the foot should be evaluated by a podiatrist.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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