Understanding Common Foot Conditions

The human foot is a complex structure containing 26 bones, 33 joints and more than 100 tendons, muscles, and ligaments. The components of your feet work together, sharing tremendous pressures of walking. An average day of walking brings a force equal to several hundred times to bear on the feet. This explains why your feet are more subjected to injury than any other part of your body.

**FOOT ILLNESS**

Foot illnesses are among the most common of our health problems, although some can be traced to heredity, many are caused by the cumulative impact of a lifetime of abuse and neglect. Your feet are specialized structures and therefore require specialized care. A podiatrist can make an important contribution to your total health whether it is regular preventive care or surgery to correct a deformity. You should see a podiatrist when any of the following conditions occur.

**ATHLETE’S FOOT**

Athlete’s foot is a skin condition usually starting between the toes on the bottom of the feet. It is caused by a fungus that thrives in a warm, dark, and moist environment. Signs of athlete’s foot are dry scaling skin, itching, inflammation, and blisters. You can help prevent infection by washing your feet daily with soap and warm water and drying carefully especially between your toes. Changing shoes and socks regularly will decrease moisture.

**CORN AND CALLUSES**

Corns and calluses are protective layers of compacted dead skin cells. They are caused by repeated friction and pressure from the skin rubbing against bony areas. Corns ordinarily form on the tops of the toes and calluses usually on the soles of the feet. The friction and pressure can cause pain and may be relieved by moleskin or padding on the affected area. Never cut corns or calluses with any instrument, and never apply home remedies. Over-the-counter acid preparations can be dangerous because they can lead to infections.

**BUNIONS**

Bunions are misaligned big toe joints which can become swollen and painful. The deformity causes the first joint of the big toe to slant outward and the big toe to angle towards the second toe. Bunions tend to be heredity based but can also be aggravated by wearing shoes that are too narrow in the forefoot and toe. There are conservative measures that can help to minimize discomfort of bunions such as padding, strapping, and orthotics but frequently surgery is recommended to correct the problem.

**HEEL SPURS**

Heel spurs are growths of bone on the bottom of the heel. They can occur without pain, although pain may result when inflammation develops at the point where the spur forms. Both heel pain and heel spurs are often associated with plantar fasciitis, inflammation of the long band of connective tissue running from the heel to the ball of the foot. The plantar fascia is a ligament, which helps support the arch of the foot. This may become inflamed with pain especially noticed upon rising from bed in the morning. Treatments may range from exercises, physical therapy, and custom-molded foot orthotics to anti-inflammatory medications and cortisone injections.

**INGROWN NAIL**

Ingrown nails are nails whose corners or sides dig painfully into the skin, often causing an infection. They are frequently caused by improper nail trimming but also from pressure from shoes, injury, fungus infection, heredity, and poor foot structure. Toenails should be trimmed straight across with nail clippers. If painful or infected, your podiatrist may remove the ingrown portion of the nail.

**NEUROMAS**

Neuromas are an enlarged, benign growth of the nerves. They are most commonly found between the third and fourth toes. They are caused by bones or other tissues rubbing against and irritating the nerves. Abnormal bony structure or pressure from poorly fitting shoes can also contribute to this condition. The most common findings are pain, burning, tingling, or numbness between the toes and the ball of the foot. Conservative treatment includes padding, taping, orthotic devices, and cortisone injections but often time’s surgery is necessary to remove the abnormal nerve growth.

**BLISTERS**

Blisters are caused by skin friction, do not pop them. Apply moleskin or an adhesive bandage over a blister and leave it on until it falls off naturally in the bath or shower. Keep your feet dry and always wears socks as a cushion between your feet and shoes. If your blister breaks on its own, wash the area, apply an antiseptic, and cover with a sterile bandage.

**WARTS**

Warts are caused by a virus, which enters the skin through small cuts or breaks. Children are most susceptible to the wart virus especially between the ages of 5 to 17 years old. Most warts are harmless and benign, even though painful and unsightly. There are several simple procedures which your podiatrist may use to remove warts. These may include applying a topical medicine or laser surgery.

**STUART W. HONICK, D.P.M., P.T.**

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Dr. Stuart W. Honick received his undergraduate degree from Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey and went on to achieve his degree in Physical Therapy at The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey/Kean College. Continuing his education at Temple University School of Podiatric Medicine Dr. Honick was awarded a degree Doctor of Podiatric Medicine (D. P. M.) and completed a two-year surgical residency. Dr. Honick is Board Certified in Foot Surgery by the American Board of Podiatric Surgery.

Dr. Stuart W. Honick has been selected as a “Top Doc” in Southern NJ.

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