

BUSINESS PROFILE



Hansen Foot & Ankle Offers Relief for Troubled Feet

by Barbara Sleeper

Most people take their feet for granted. After all, they are a *long way down there* and often hard to reach. But it turns out our fascinating feet deserve some hefty R-E-S-P-E-C-T.

Comprised of 26 bones, 33 joints, and more than 100 muscles, ligaments and tendons, a human foot has a lot of moving parts, plus more sweat glands than any other part of our body. Every day, our cute little feet endure amazing pressure carrying our weight from place to place.

All this stress means our tootsies are at high risk of injury. Problems can develop from simple wear and tear, ill-fitting shoes, neglect, overuse, or just plain lack of awareness. Beyond blisters, pain in our feet may also be the first sign of a systemic problem like gout, or a more serious illness like diabetes.

The good news is that it is now easier than ever to get your feet checked out. Hansen Foot & Ankle (established in 2017) just opened their new clinic in Mill Creek on February 7, 2022. The clinic is conveniently located just south of the Mill Creek Post Office in the Mill Creek Pavilion building on Bothell Everett Highway.

“We provide a comprehensive range of services, from treatments for nail fungus, warts, bunions, plantar

fasciitis, and tendinitis to reconstructive foot surgery,” says skilled podiatrist, Nathan Hansen, DPM. “Arthritis, diabetic foot problems, ingrown toenails, ankle sprains: We do it all!

“For example, fungus is everywhere,” Hansen explains. “Fungus grows in warm, dark, and moist environments, making the shod foot the perfect setting for fungal growth, especially in wet environments like the PNW. These infections are painless and can easily be neglected for years leading to unsightly infections, and eventually pain.

“Painful heels are often caused by plantar fasciitis, an inflammation of the tissues along the soles of your feet. We offer several effective treatments, including platelet-rich plasma (PRP) injections, and extracorporeal shockwave therapy which deliver significant improvements after the first treatment. We also provide plantar fascia release surgery for severe cases.

“I decided to become a podiatrist, in part, because I had a wonderful youth advisor who was a podiatrist,” says Hansen. “I remember how he repaired me



As both life and business partners, Nathan and Diana enjoy running their Mill Creek podiatry clinic together.

Left: Nathan uses ropes to safely explore Vesper Peak (6,221 ft.) in the North Cascades.

and my friends during our various misadventures as we grew up.

“During college, I was interested in Medicine and Engineering, so I combined both and graduated in Bioengineering. I worked with surgeons and as an engineer designing implants. Seeing the value of being a specialist, and being a big endurance runner myself, I was drawn to the foot and ankle. This led to my enrolling in Podiatry School to become a foot and ankle surgeon.

“I received my degree from the California School of Podiatric Medicine in

Oakland, California in 2014. I then attended the Puget Sound VA Health Care program in Seattle where I completed my residency training to become eligible for board certification in rearfoot surgery. I am now a foot and ankle surgeon specializing in sports injuries and diabetic ulcers.”

Registered nurse, Diana Salazar, is the office manager and team lead in charge of business operations. “We spent three months tirelessly planning, setting up, and outfitting our new clinic,” she says. “We designed the clinic to reflect our love of the outdoors and to make our patients feel

welcome. Our office is modern and sleek: The exam rooms are named after our favorite Pacific Northwest mountains.

“I earned my nursing degree at the University of Washington and have continued to work in Emergency and Trauma Medicine,” adds Diana. “In addition to managing our new clinic, I also work as a Flight Nurse for Airlift Northwest, flying critically ill patients to hospitals in our region.”

Nate and Diana have been life partners for some time. They met on an online dating app, where they were drawn to each other because of their



Dr. Hansen is an endurance athlete and sports medicine expert who understands the mindset of driven athletes. Here he is still smiling at mile 50 of the Bear 100 in Utah.



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Walk. Run. Live. Our goal is to help every patient live their best life pain-free says Dr. Hansen.

daring, venturesome spirits. With a shared love of the outdoors, they've spent many years climbing, sailing, and trail running together all over the Pacific Northwest.

"Our adventurous attitudes made us perfect partners, excited to take on difficult challenges of all types," says Diana. "However, I never thought our relationship would evolve into running a podiatry clinic together.

"We treat patients of all ages, including those on Medicare," she adds. "Our team works incredibly hard to make every day go smoothly. We are dedicated to our patients and go above and beyond to create a great experience for each one."

After years of experience, Dr. Hansen has treated just about every condition that can hamper one's gait.

"Bunions are painful," he says. "They form when the top of your toe points inward, causing the bone at the bottom to push outward. Genetics, tight-fitting shoes (with pointed toes or high heels), and aging with complications from arthritis, can cause them. We offer effective nonsurgical solutions for bunion pain and advanced surgery to realign your bones.

"Ingrown toenails form when the side of the nail grows into the flesh of your toe. This happens when you don't cut your toenails straight across or you cut them too short. The affected toe (usually your big toe) becomes swollen, red, painful, and in severe cases, infected. Then it's best to get expert treatment. Without it, an

ingrown toenail can cause further complications with your foot, especially if you are diabetic.

"Warts are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV) of which there are more than 100 different kinds. Only a few of them cause warts on your feet, called plantar warts. The most common plantar warts typically appear on your heels or other weight-bearing areas, and they can be painful.

"The HPV virus that causes plantar warts invades your body through breaks in your skin, like cuts on the bottom of your feet," warns Dr. Hansen. "Walking barefoot in places like changing rooms and around swimming pools, where the wart-causing virus lives, can expose you to infection."

According to Hansen, plantar warts most often affect children and young people. "I use several advanced treatments to destroy them, including cryotherapy."

Tendinitis results from repetitive stress causing inflammation of a tendon, a tough band of connective tissue that attaches a muscle to a bone. It can also occur if you suddenly increase the intensity or length of your exercise routine.

Tendinitis can affect any tendon in your feet and ankles, particularly the extensor tendons that run across the top of your foot or the peroneal and posterior tibial tendons in your ankles. However, irritation of the Achilles tendon is by far the most common source of tendinitis pain in feet and ankles.

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"Without treatment, tendinitis can cause *tendinopathy*," says Hansen. "This is the breakdown of the tendon, causing it to become hard, thickened and scarred. If you have symptoms of tendinitis, it is important to get prompt treatment."

Backache and aching legs can also be caused by foot and ankle problems. Dr. Hansen offers custom-fitted orthotics specifically designed to cushion and support your feet. The shoe inserts help correct for plantar fasciitis, bunions, bursitis, arthritis, flat feet, calluses, diabetic ulcers, and tendinitis, and help reduce pain following surgery. And by correcting any misalignments of your feet and ankles, they also relieve back and leg pain.

"To create them, I examine your feet and gait, then I use either 3D images, or physical casts of your feet held in a corrected position, to design the devices. Properly designed orthotics give you the support you need without causing imbalances in other parts of your feet, ankles, legs or back.

"Foot and ankle injuries are common in people who actively participate in sports. I know first-hand how feet and ankles often suffer trauma on the sports field and during training. As an endurance athlete and sports medicine expert, I well understand the mindset of driven athletes.

"Some activities are more likely to cause foot and ankle injuries," he

Dr. Hansen and Diana are avid climbers and have summited many of the major NW peaks together, seen here on the 14,411-foot summit of Mount Rainier.



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advises, “including running, basketball, football, soccer, jumping and dancing. I treat foot and ankle sports injuries, from tendinitis to stress fractures.

“For the patient trying to lose weight or train for a race, ramp up slowly,” advises Hansen. “Your body takes time to adapt to increased stress and strain. This will help prevent injuries that can slow down your progress.

“Failing to warm up, not stretching properly, and wearing incorrect or tight-fitting footwear can increase your risk of sports injuries. Taping can provide your feet and ankles with additional support. Many foot and ankle conditions can be avoided if you follow these safety measures.

“Everyone needs to be careful early on in an outing when our ankles are not warmed up yet and our minds are racing, ready to get going: This can lead to injuries. Ankle injuries also occur when we are fatigued late in the game or toward the end of an outing.

“I like the term *play ready*,” adds Dr. Hansen, “meaning that we try to stay in relatively good shape all the time, so we are always ready for an adventure. The idea of coming *straight off the couch* or only being a *weekend warrior* is a recipe for disaster.”

When initial treatments for painful problems like bunions and plantar fasciitis don’t work, foot surgery is usually the next step. Dr. Hansen is highly skilled in surgeries ranging from *bunionectomy* to foot reconstruction. “We perform very simple procedures in the office and take more involved

surgeries to Evergreen Health Medical Center in Kirkland,” says Diana.

“While conducting a routine foot exam, I’m often the first provider to discover systemic problems like peripheral vascular disease or gout. Many people don’t understand that gout effects the entire body and could be the cause of other non-foot related problems.



State-of-the-art treatments and custom-fitted orthotics are available at the new Hansen Foot & Ankle clinic.

“I remember one patient whose foot exam uncovered major blockages in the arteries up near his hips, causing him chronic hip pain. He was able to meet with a vascular surgeon to get successfully treated.”

Diabetes can dramatically increase your risk of foot complications by affecting the nerves and blood vessels of the body. Diabetic and non-diabetic *neuropathy* occurs when the nerves in your feet stop functioning correctly. When people can’t feel their feet, their feet can’t tell them when they’re injured. This can result in ulcers, infections, and eventually amputations.

“If you are diabetic, it is important to check your

feet daily, and schedule an annual foot exam by a provider to prevent complications.

“For my older patients, I stress how important it is to keep their feet clean and to use a good foot cream containing urea or uric acid. This will help to keep the skin soft and prevent many common skin problems. The best time to apply foot creams is during the first few minutes after bathing,

when the skin is extra absorbent.

“Nice weather tempts all of us to kick into high gear after being stuck inside during the rainy season. Again, be sure to ramp up slowly, train appropriately, and wear the right gear to support your feet and ankles. Cheap flip flops are the worst thing for your feet. Leave them by the pool and put on supportive footwear for those long summer adventures!”

Hansen is passionate about treating patients and helping them enjoy an active, rewarding life. “A favorite part of my practice is bumping into patients in the community and seeing them happy and

enjoying life, pain-free, after being a part of their care. Eliminating someone’s foot or ankle pain gives them back their life.

“Our motto at the practice is *Walk. Run. Live*. Whether we are helping someone enjoy their daily walk again, or run their first marathon, our goal is to help every patient live their best life.”

When not at work, Dr. Hansen and Diana can be found adventuring all over the place. They are avid climbers and have summited many of the major NW peaks together. They can also be found exploring the San Juan Islands aboard their 23-foot sailboat, *Tranquility*.

Dr. Hansen definitely walks the talk. He is an endurance ultra-marathoner who says he is constantly training for his next crazy, long objective. He is also an avid skier and ski mountaineer and regularly participates in backcountry skiing, climbing and ultra-trail running.

“I love Washington because of the beauty and diversity the Seattle area has to offer,” enthuses Hansen, “and I adore the mountains. Mill Creek is close to the Cascades and the San Juan Islands making it a great launching point for weekend adventures.”

Interestingly, Dr. Hansen was caught in a major avalanche on Mt. Shuksan in May 2021 and suffered a broken leg. “I spent the next many weeks on crutches and in a walking boot limping around the clinic. This helped me better empathize with my hobbled patients and their equally painful experiences.

“I sure enjoy the variety

of people I interact with here in Mill Creek,” says Hansen. “At the clinic, we encounter all age groups, backgrounds, and life stories. Best of all, by living in the area, I often cross paths with patients I’ve helped overcome serious foot and ankle problems. I love seeing them thriving and happy.”

Chronic foot and ankle pain affects the quality of everyone’s lives. The nice folks at Hansen Foot & Ankle understand this and go out of their way to accommodate hectic schedules. Call Hansen Foot & Ankle today or use their online inquiry form to schedule a convenient consultation. Your tootsies will thank you.

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