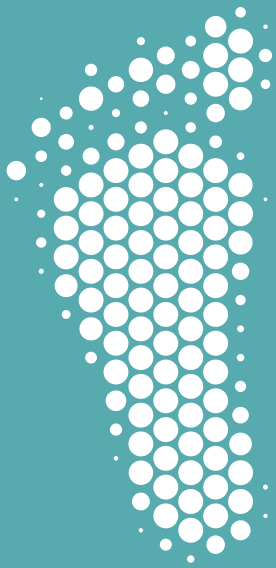

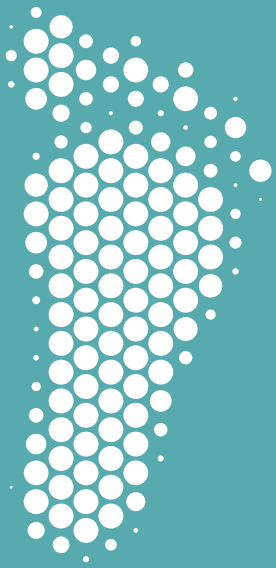

Looking after your feet

How you should be involved in decisions about your healthcare and treatment.

Aberdeen City Health & Social Care Partnership
A caring partnership

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

NHS Grampian

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Introduction

Good footcare is important no matter what age you are. Well cared for feet can improve your comfort, mobility, confidence, independence and have an impact on your overall quality of life. It is important that, as you get older, you continue to get the most out of life and you are able to carry out activities that are important to you.

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1. What is personal footcare?

Personal footcare is the term we use for what a healthy adult would normally do themselves for their own feet if they are able to. You can do a lot to keep your own feet in good condition.

This includes:

- **Checking that your feet are in good order.**
- **Keeping your feet clean.**
- **Caring for your skin.**
- **Keeping your toenails at a good length.**
- **Choosing and wearing good fitting footwear.**
- **Getting help if you notice a problem.**

2. Checking your feet

To be able to see any problems quickly you should try and check your feet every day. One way to check your feet is by using two chairs or stools of a similar height. Sit on one and face the other towards you.

Bring your leg towards your chest and place one foot on the edge of the other chair or stool. Keep your other foot on the floor. It is best to do this where there is good natural light or in a well-lit room.

Check one foot at a time. Look at the top, the sole, the heel, and the toes and in between the toes. Are there any cuts or sores? Is there any blood or fluid leaking from a sore area? Look out for any changes such as redness, swelling or bruising. If you can't see the soles of your feet very well try placing a mirror behind your foot or ask someone else to check this for you.

If you have any concerns, or are worried about your feet, contact your NHS Podiatry Department or Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC) registered Podiatrist if you attend one or contact your GP.

3. Keeping your feet clean

Wash your feet every day. If you are unable to get into the shower or bath regularly it may be easier to wash your feet using a basin. Before you start make sure you have everything you need beside you - some mild soap, a soft brush such as a nail brush and a clean dry towel.

Fill the basin half full of warm water. Sit comfortably on a chair and place both your feet in the water. Use the soap to lather up and clean all areas of your feet making sure you get in between your toes.

Use the soft brush to rub over the nails. Try not to soak your feet for too long - no more than 10 minutes is the rule otherwise you will dry out the skin.

Dry both your feet carefully taking care to pat dry in between your toes. If you find it difficult to dry in between your toes you could try using cotton buds or folded cotton wool pads.

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4. Skin care

If your skin is dry apply a moisturising cream every day over the dry areas - usually the tops, the heel and the soles of the feet. Massage the cream in well using small circular movements.

Do not put cream in between your toes. If your skin is very moist, after your daily wash, use cotton wool that is wet with some surgical spirit to dab the soles of the feet and in between your toes.

It is natural for feet to sweat, however, sometimes this can be excessive. Sweaty feet can cause an odour with the skin between the toes becoming white and damp. That is why it is important to wash and dry your feet thoroughly every day. You can remove small patches of hard skin from your feet by using a foot file or pumice stone. Gently rub the affected area in one direction.

5. The personal footcare kit

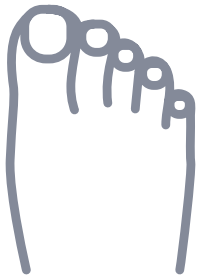
Some things that you might like to keep in a personal footcare kit are:

- **Nail clippers.**
- **Nail file or emery board.**
- **Foot file.**

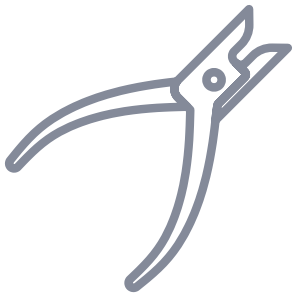
You may want to keep these items together with some skin wipes in a plastic box or zipped plastic bag. You can buy nail clippers, files and emery boards in your local high street or on line.

To keep your personal footcare tools clean and in good order wash metal and plastic items in warm soapy water after you use them. Rinse them in clear hot or cold water and allow them to dry thoroughly before storing them back in your plastic box or bag.

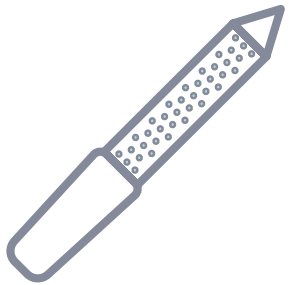
Preventing the spread of germs is very important and this is why you should have your own personal nail clippers and file and keep them for your use only. Always wash and dry your hands before and after cutting your toenails.



Good footcare



Nail clippers



Nail File

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6. Cutting and filing your toenails

Are you sitting comfortably? Before you start, make sure you have your nail clippers and file to hand. One way to cut your toenails is by using two chairs or stools of a similar height. Sit on one and face the other towards you. Bring your leg towards your chest and place one foot on the edge of the other chair or stool and keep your other foot on the floor. Cut the toenails on one foot and then swap over and do the other foot when you are ready.

6.1. Cutting your toenails

To cut your nails make several small clips or nibbles on the nail with the tip of the nail clippers. Cut the nails following their natural shape. Aim to have the final length of the nail just below the tip of each toe. Do not cut down the sides of nails as this can leave the surrounding skin uncomfortable.

6.2. Filing your toenails

Remove any rough edges using a nail file or emery board. File the nails in the direction away from the ankle or in a sideways motion from the sides to the centre of each nail. File thickened nails both in the length and the thickness. It is easier to file nails when they are dry and filing nails once a week will keep them at a reasonable length.

You do not need to cut or file all 10 toenails at one go - you can spread this out over a number of days if this is more suitable for you. When you are finished wash your hands and throw the nail clippings in your bin. You may prefer to file your nails regularly as this avoids the need to clip your nails.

7. Footwear

Footwear means, shoes, slippers, socks or tights - anything that goes on your feet. Wear shoes that are suited to the activity you are doing. A good shoe should support and protect your foot and allow natural movement during walking. Poorly fitting footwear can cause problems, such as corns, calluses and ingrowing toenails.

7.1. Hosiery

Socks should contain a high proportion of natural materials such as cotton or wool - this allows sweat to evaporate from the skin. Wear wool in winter for warmth and cotton in summer for coolness. Make sure socks and tights are not too tight - or pulled up too tight and cutting into the skin.

7.2 Top tips for good footwear

- **Upper - made of leather or breathable natural or synthetic materials with seam-free linings.**
- **Toe-box - deep and roomy at the front of the shoe to prevent pressure on the toes and joints on the side of the foot.**
- **Sole - cushioned and flexible with good grip.**
- **Heel - no more than 3cm (1 1/2") high and broad enough to provide stability.**
- **Fastenings - laces, buckles or velcro straps hold the shoe comfortably and securely on the foot.**

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8. What to do if you have a foot problem

These are some foot problems that might cause some concern. For example: If your toe or part of your foot is red, hot, swollen or painful. If there are any signs of leaking blood or fluid such as pus. If you have any of these and are worried about your feet, then contact your local NHS Podiatry Department or your GP practice for advice.

9. Frequently asked questions

9.1. Should I cut or file my nails?

It is a personal preference. It may be easier to file your nails regularly and keep them in good order after they have been trimmed to a suitable length.

9.2. Should I cut my toenails straight across?

Follow the natural shape of your toe and the final length should lie just below the tip of the toe. Avoid cutting into the corners.

9.3. Can I use scissors to cut my nails?

Yes, if that's what works well for you and is what you are comfortable using. Nail clippers give you a bit more control than scissors and using the point of the nail clippers can allow you to work across the nail in small stages.

9.4. When is the best time to cut or file my toenails?

Whenever is a convenient time for you. Some people find it easier to cut their nails after bathing their feet when the nails are a bit softer. Filing is best carried out when the feet are dry so do this before bathing. You don't need to cut or file all your nails at one go - you can do a few one day and so on.

9.5. What if my toe bleeds when cutting my nails?

Clean the area with lukewarm water and apply light pressure with a piece of cotton wool or cloth. Cover the cut with a clean dressing and leave in place for 48 hours. Contact your GP practice for advice if you are worried that the area is not healing properly.

9.6. Why doesn't the podiatrist cut my nails?

Looking after your nails is something that most people can do for themselves and is part of personal care. Podiatrists have specialist skills in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of a wide range of abnormal conditions that affect the feet and legs.

9.7. Where can I buy footcare equipment such as clippers and files?

Nail clippers and files can be bought from high street stores, local pharmacies, mail order or on the internet. Cardboard, polystyrene or metal files are all suitable.

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10. Useful contacts and websites

There is additional information and some short films about personal footcare on the website:

http://www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/home/portals-and- topics/personal-footcare-portal.aspx

If you are looking for advice about a specific foot problem there are a number of places that you could contact. These include your local NHS Podiatry Department, Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) registered Podiatrist, your GP practice or your local pharmacy/chemist. There are various websites that provide good information about footcare that include:

- **Age Scotland: http: //www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland**
- **Arthritis Research UK: http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org**
- **Alzheimer Scotland: http://www.alzscot.org**
- **Care Information Scotland (Falls Prevention): http://www.careinfoscotland.co.uk**
- **Diabetes UK (Scotland): http://www.diabetes.org.uk/In_Your_Area/Scotland**
- **NHS Inform: http://www.nhsinform.co.uk**
- **The Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists: http://www.scpod.org**

Further Information:

Useful Information for patients:

- **www.nhsinform.co.uk**
- **www.patient.co.uk**
- **NHS 24 MSK Help App**
- **www.paintoolkit.or**

For further information and advice please contact:

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Aberdeen Health Village
50 Frederick Street
Aberdeen
AB24 5HY
Tel: 0345 099 0200