

## What to do if you notice a foot problem

These are some foot problems that might cause some concern.



### What to look out for:

If their toe or part of their foot is **red, hot, and swollen, painful, leaking blood or fluid** such as pus.

If you notice any of these signs and are worried about an individual's feet, then contact your local NHS podiatry department or your GP practice for advice.

#### 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.

#### Should toenails be cut 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.

#### Can I use scissors to cut toenails?

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.

#### When is the best time to cut or file toenails?

Whenever is a convenient time for you both. Some people find it easier to cut nails after bathing feet when the nails are a bit softer. Filing is best carried out when the feet are dry so do this before bathing.

#### What if a toe bleeds?

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 the persons GP practice for advice if you are worried that the area is not healing properly.

#### Why doesn't the podiatrist cut my nails?

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

#### 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.



The Scottish  
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Riaghaltas na h-Alba

# Personal footcare Looking after someone else's feet

[www.lookafteryourfeet.info](http://www.lookafteryourfeet.info)

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## What is personal footwear?

Personal footwear is the term we use for what a healthy adult would normally do for themselves for their own feet if they are able to. You can do a lot to support others with personal footwear and help to keep their feet in good condition.

This includes:

- checking that feet are in good order
- keeping your feet clean
- providing skin care
- keeping toenails at a good length
- choosing and wearing good fitting footwear
- getting help if you notice a problem



## Checking your feet

Get to know the feet of the person you are caring for and know what is normal for them. It is best to do this where there is good natural light or in a well-lit room. Sit on a stool or chair facing the person and place their foot on your lap. If the individual is very immobile it may be easier for them to sit on their bed with their legs outstretched.

If you have any concerns, or are worried about a person's feet, contact your local NHS Podiatry Department or Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC) registered podiatrist if the person you are caring for attends one – or contact their GP.

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.

To be able to see any problems quickly you should try and check their feet every day. If the person you are caring for has diabetes make sure they get a healthcare professional to check their feet once a year as part of their annual diabetes review.

## Keeping feet clean

Wash their feet every day if possible as part of good personal hygiene practice. If they are unable to get into the shower or bath regularly it may be easier to wash their 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. Get the person to sit comfortably on a chair and place both their feet in the water. Use the soap to lather up and clean all areas of their feet making sure you get in between their toes. Use the soft brush to rub over the nails. Try not to soak their feet for too long – no more than 10 minutes is the rule otherwise you will dry out the skin.

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

## Skin care

If their skin is dry apply a moisturising cream every day over the dry areas – usually the tops, the heel area and the soles. Massage the cream in well using small circular movements.

**Do not put cream in between your toes.**

If their skin is very moist, after the daily wash, use cotton wool that is wet with some surgical spirit to dab the soles of the feet and in between their 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 their feet thoroughly every day.

You can remove small patches of hard skin from their feet by using a foot file or pumice stone. Gently rub the affected area in one direction.

## Footwear

### 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



Shoes should be worn where possible and slippers only worn for a short time before bed and a short time when the person gets up in the morning when they are less mobile.

## 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 person's skin.

## The personal footcare kit

Here are some things that an individual might like to include in a personal footcare kit:

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



These items can be kept together in a plastic box or zipped plastic bag. You can buy nail clippers, files and emery boards in your local high street or online.

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

Preventing the spread of germs is very important and this is why every person should have their own personal nail clippers and file and these should be kept for their own use only. Always wash and dry your hands before and after touching a person's feet or cutting or filing their toenails.



## How to cut and file toenails

When cutting and/or filing a person's nails you will need to first ask for their permission to do this and ask what they prefer. It is their personal preference either to have their toenails cut or filed.

### Are you sitting comfortably?

Sit facing the person and place their foot on your lap on top of a small towel. If possible, have the light source from a window or lamp shining on the person's feet. If the person is unable to raise their leg onto your lap it may be easier if they sit on their bed with their legs outstretched with you sitting on a chair or stool at the end of the bed.



### Cutting toenails

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.



## Filing your toenails

Remove any rough edges using a nail file or emery board. File the nails in the direction away from the person's 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 toenails once a week will keep them at a reasonable length.

When you are finished wash your hands and throw the nail clippings in the bin.



## Footwear

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

