

Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



April 2005

April is Foot Health Awareness Month



Each April, the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA) sponsors Foot Health Awareness Month to increase awareness about the importance of proper foot and ankle care. Because seventy-five percent of Americans will experience foot problems sometime in their lives, the

APMA emphasizes the importance of preventative care.

Facts about Feet

The foot is a complex structure made up of 26 bones, 33 joints, 107 ligaments, and 19 muscles and tendons. In fact, the bones in your feet make up about one quarter of all the bones in your body.

The APMA estimates that, over a lifetime, the average person walks about 115,000 miles—enough to walk around the earth four times! When you walk, the pressure on your feet can exceed your body weight. When you run, the pressure can be three or four times your weight.

Foot Ailments

Foot problems are among the most common health problems in the U.S. The tremendous daily pressures on your feet subject feet and ankles to more injuries than any other part of your body.

Doctors of podiatric medicine say that your feet are a mirror of your general health. Some serious medical problems, such as arthritis, kidney problems,

diabetes, and nerve and circulatory disorders, can first appear as symptoms in the feet. Always seek professional care if you experience burning or tingling sensations, feelings of cold, numbness, or discoloration in your feet or toes.

Very few people are born with foot problems, but a lifetime of wear and tear, neglect, and ill-fitting shoes contribute to the majority of foot problems. Women are about four times more likely to have foot problems than men. This is largely due to lifelong patterns of wearing high heels.

Many people, especially older people, incorrectly believe that foot pain and discomfort are normal. They resign themselves to enduring foot problems that could be treated. Because feet are complex structures, they require specialized care. A podiatrist can make an important contribution to your overall health by treating foot ailments, relieving foot pain, and limiting the possibility of other medical problems.

Treating Foot Injuries

The APMA recommends “RICE” as the first step to treating a foot or ankle injury:

- **Rest.** Reduce your activity, and get off your feet.
- **Ice.** Gently place a plastic bag of ice on the injured area in a 20-minute-on, 40-minute-off cycle.
- **Compression.** Lightly wrap an Ace bandage around the area, but do not pull it too tight.
- **Elevation.** To reduce swelling and pain, sit in a position where you can elevate the foot higher than the waist.

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Footwear

Proper footwear is essential for protecting your feet. Men and women should purchase different shoes for work and leisure activities. Generally, shoes should be low-heeled, cushioned and provide adequate support. For people who work in heavy industry, safety shoes or boots are necessary to protect feet from injuries. Also, many sports, such as tennis or running, require specialized shoes. Remember to keep your shoes clean and in good repair.

Children's Shoes

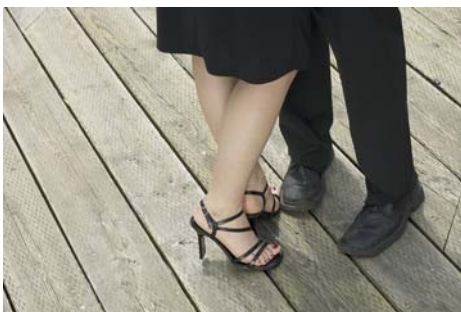
Although babies do not need shoes, children should wear shoes to support their feet. Because children's feet grow fast, have their feet measured each time you buy them new shoes. Also, don't let your kids wear hand-me-down shoes.

Women's Shoes

Women inflict much punishment on their feet by wearing high-heeled shoes. Podiatrists believe that high-heeled shoes are medically unsound and contribute to posture problems.

To minimize the damaging effects of high-heels, women should limit the amount of time they spend wearing high-heels, alternating them with low-heeled shoes for part of the day.

Source: American Podiatric Medical Association



County Health Pool Training

In an effort to help keep health care costs down, CHP is focusing its "loss prevention" type training on educating our members to become wise health care consumers.

CHP's benefit administrators, John Britton and Rebecca Hartt, will be presenting three training sessions for each member entity during the year. They will provide information about a variety of topics, including: how the pool

works, the costs of physician visits and hospital stays, how to save money by using generic drugs, and why consumers should use a PPO Blue Preferred Anthem Provider.

The benefit administrators will emphasize that, as part of a pool, the money that consumers spend on health care is actually their own money. So, please don't miss out on these free educational meetings.

The APMA's Top Ten Foot Health Tips

The American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA) offers the following tips to help keep feet healthy:

1. Don't ignore foot pain—it's not normal. If the pain persists, see a podiatric physician.
2. Inspect your feet regularly. Pay attention to changes in color and temperature of your feet. Look for thick or discolored nails, and check for cracks or cuts in the skin. Peeling or scaling on the soles of feet could indicate athlete's foot. Any growth on the foot is not considered normal.
3. Wash your feet regularly, especially between the toes, and be sure to dry them completely.
4. Trim toenails straight across, but not too short. Be careful not to cut nails in corners or on the sides; it can lead to ingrown toenails. Persons with diabetes, poor circulation or heart problems should not treat their own feet because they are more prone to infection.
5. Make sure that your shoes fit properly. Purchase new shoes later in the day when feet tend to be at their largest and replace worn out shoes as soon as possible.
6. Select and wear the right shoe for the activity that you are engaged in (e.g., running shoes for running).
7. Alternate shoes—don't wear the same pair of shoes every day.
8. Avoid walking barefooted—your feet will be more prone to injury and infection. At the beach or when wearing sandals always use sunblock on your feet as the rest of your body.
9. Be cautious when using home remedies for foot ailments; self-treatment can often turn a minor problem into a major one.
10. If you have diabetes, it is vital that you see a podiatric physician at least once a year for a checkup.