

Dr. Doug Tumen
Q&A
Ask the Foot Doctor

1. As a podiatrist of 35 years, what are the more common foot-related ailments and injuries to come across your office?

Great question. In general, anything and everything related to the foot and ankle walks in our door on a daily basis. It could be someone who stepped on a nail, to someone who sprained their ankle playing basketball, to a concerned mom worrying about their child's feet, to a diabetic with a serious foot infection. However, some of the more common foot problems we see daily are painful ingrown toenails, heel pain and plantar fasciitis, foot deformities needing correction, such as bunions and hammer toes, diabetics in need of foot care, plantar warts, fungus toenails, flat feet, foot injuries from sprains to fractures, gout attacks, tendon injuries, seniors care, and just people complaining of being tired of suffering with foot aches and pains.

2. How many of these conditions are preventable, if only people had more awareness of them?

Many of the more common foot problems and conditions are preventable with proper education and awareness. The best example is with diabetics. Most of the serious diabetic foot complications, such as diabetic wounds, infections, and amputations are totally preventable if a diabetic does one simple thing; an annual diabetic foot examination. Diabetics who are educated and examined regularly by a foot specialist avoid most of the serious foot complications by following the simple do's and don'ts, taking precautions and understanding their personal risk factors. Unfortunately, the first time we often see a diabetic is when they show up with an infection or a wound that requires hospitalization. Totally preventable. Of course, so many other foot problems are also avoidable with simple awareness and education.

3. Please give us some good foot fundamentals on everyday care for our feet.

Foot care can be pretty simple and does not need to be complicated. Our feet do so much for us and a small amount of TLC can go a long way. The best thing far and away you can do for your feet is to wear comfortable shoes. Give your feet some love and don't force them into shoes because they look good or match your outfit. Shoes should have a combination of support and cushioning. Support to hold your feet up to their daily tasks, and cushioning because we live in a concrete world. Daily massage, rolling your

feet on a rolling pin or tennis ball, stretching your foot and leg muscles, and applying a good moisturizing cream are great ways to keep them happy.

4. What are some of the symptoms to common foot conditions?

One of the most common painful foot condition we treat is plantar fasciitis. Plantar fasciitis seems to be at epidemic proportions based on how many people we see with this painful foot condition. If you wake up in the morning and your foot hurts getting out of bed, if it hurts any time after you sit and get back up, and if you have pain around your heel that may extend into your arch, chances are you have plantar fasciitis. Sometimes the area surrounding the bottom of your heel may be swollen, and sometimes it can ache even if you are sitting or are just lying in bed. Pain can persist throughout the entire day and often causes one to limp because of the pain.

5. What role could one's diet play in foot health?

Diet is always important because as the saying goes: "we are what we eat". And diet does play a role in a few common areas relating to foot health. First and most common is a condition called gout. Gout used to be known as "Rich Man's Disease" or "Disease of Kings" because it was related to a diet heavy in meat and certain foods or alcohol. Now we know more specifically which foods trigger a gout attack, what should be avoided and how it can be helped. Diabetes of course is the most common medical condition that can be worsened or more importantly improved simply by shifting our diet. And here is an important tip: The best diet for you and your feet is simply a steady diet of daily exercise!

6. Does exercise do more harm than good when it comes to our feet?

Exercise, a good diet and sleep are the trifecta for your health. So, no matter what condition your feet are in, exercise is essential. For those that can, which is most people, walking is the simplest way to get your exercise in. Just a 20-minute walk is proven to have great cardiac benefits, improve your circulation, help lose weight, in addition to easing stress, and improving mindset. There are certainly instances where foot pain can limit exercise, and some modification of exercise is necessary. Often, I tell a patient to ride a stationary bike, use an elliptical machine, swim or take an aqua aerobics class. It is rare that exercise is going to damage feet and the benefits are too great, so as the saying goes, Just Do It!

7. Some serious diseases are associated with our feet, including diabetes. What do our feet tell us about our overall health?

Your feet can actually be a wonderful window into your body. It's common for a podiatrist to be the first physician to diagnose a patient with diabetes. Rheumatoid arthritis and other types of arthritis such as psoriatic arthritis are commonly first spotted in the feet. PAD, peripheral arterial disease is going to show up in the feet and legs as pain with walking or at rest. Skin texture, skin color, toenail changes, or also windows. X-rays we take of the feet are often the first a patient may know that they have

osteopenia, osteoporosis and weakening of their bones. And of course, gout, which is elevated uric acid in the blood is most commonly seen as a red hot swollen and painful great toe joint

8. Are there dangers associated with pedicures?

Ah, the perils of pedicures! Countless women are horrified when they take off their nail polish and see yellow and white spots covering their toenails. And it is so frustrating to develop a painful ingrown toenail after a pedicure went awry. As I often tell my patients, pedicures can be great but they also should be educated on the do's and don'ts of pedicures. First, nail polish is toxic, filled with chemicals such as formaldehyde and toluene and left in place for long periods of time, will allow for fungus to breed on the nail. New anti-fungal non-toxic nail polish is now available and will not promote fungus. Instruments and sterilization are a whole additional topic as different strands of fungus will survive cold sterilization and are considered contagious.

9. Are certain shoes bad for our feet? Why?

Yes, there are many types of shoes that can cause pain and even damage your feet. Everyone's feet are different and what may be comfortable for one person may cause foot pain for another. Most importantly your shoes should be comfortable and if they cause pain should be replaced. Wrong sized shoes are responsible for a lot of people's foot pain. Keep in mind our feet "grow" as we age. Most people recognize as we age, we often shrink in height, but our feet also are affected as they spread and expand. Get your feet measured, but don't go by size alone, go by comfort. High heels and flats each have their challenges when it comes to the feet. If a shoe makes your foot hurt, ditch them. Remember function over fashion is always the best way to show some love to your feet.

10. Are there alternatives to foot surgery?

Foot surgery is often necessary to fix painful foot deformities or to align broken bones. However, there are also many alternatives to surgery for some of the more common foot issues. For example, it used to be common for heel spurs to be removed. Nowadays, that procedure is rarely performed because of advances in non-invasive procedures. Radial pulse therapy, shock wave therapy, and platelet rich plasma injections are new advanced techniques to cure plantar fasciitis and heel spur pain non-surgically. Many times, orthotics, which are specialty inserts, can be used to support and protect feet in attempt to avoid certain surgeries. Guided ultrasound injections can help to minimize certain arthritis and joint pain to limit surgical corrections. It is the goal of most foot specialists and patients to find a non-surgical cure where possible.

11. Once it's deemed necessary, how should patients choose a good foot surgeon?

Choosing a qualified and experienced surgeon should be the number one job of any patient who may require surgery on their feet. Here are some tips. Look for board certification. That shows the surgeon has met the standards in that specialty to provide quality results. Make sure your podiatrist is board

certified by the American Board of Foot and Ankle Surgeons. Seek other people in your community who have had similar surgeries and find out about their experience. Make sure you are comfortable with your doctor and they are willing to give you time and answer all your questions. The local hospital or surgical center also may be places to seek recommendations.

12. You've finished nine marathons. Do you recommend running as a safe sport?

Running is a lifestyle and passion for me. Being the "running foot doctor" has been a great way for me to experience some of the same injuries as my patients. Although, I love running it is not for everyone. Your body frame, knee issues, back issues or other medical concerns may preclude running as an option. However, for those that want to and can run pain-free, running is an exercise that is super-safe and can be done for a lifetime. I have been fortunate to have completed nine marathons, including the NYC Marathon seven times. Running centers my life and some of my best ideas magically appear during my runs. Start slow, get a good pair of running shoes, have fun!

13. How can people avoid sports injuries to their feet?

Participating in sports or being an avid exerciser is a wonderful thing. However, if you do enough, sooner or later you are going to end up with a sports injury. It happens to most everyone. Over the years I have found injuries fall into different categories. There are the unavoidable, (stepping in a hole); and then there are the overuse injuries which are the most common and most avoidable. Injuries such as tendonitis, stress fractures, and pulled muscles usually happen when attempting to do more than usual. This could be more weights, more running, more speed, more reps. The best way to avoid injuries is to start slowly, keep track of your workouts, and listen to your body. Injuries can also be a great time to discover another exercise activity or passion.

14. What do young parents need to know about fitting their children with the proper footwear?

One of the dilemmas of new parents is to decide if it is best to fit their baby with shoes or let them be barefoot. It is perfectly acceptable for your baby who is learning to walk, to be barefoot and feel the sensations of their feet on the floor as they develop their balance and muscle strength. As they grow, the most important thing is to make sure your child's foot is comfortable in the shoes with no red marks or irritation. Also, best not to oversize by too much because you know their feet will grow. Try to go to a shoe store that measures your child's foot. If you have any concerns about how your child is walking, see a foot specialist, as it is better to get advice and discover potential issues sooner than later.

15. When might home remedies kick in for someone with a foot-related ailment?

Home remedies are often a great way to try to treat many conditions as we can't run to the doctor for every ache and pain. For certain foot issues such as a fungus toenail, a plantar wart, or arch pain, some home remedies can be helpful. An example is getting an over-the-counter medication for a wart. See if it helps. Same for getting an arch support for a painful arch. You can then tell your doctor what you tried

and what worked and didn't work as this may help with getting the best treatment plan for you. If you are a diabetic it is always best to get professional advice on home care and treatments to avoid any potential complications. As with any condition, if it does not respond, get a professional diagnosis and care plan.

New Question Added:

16. Why do you invite people to send in questions about their feet to askthefootdoctor.com ?

Every person has their own individual story and personal situation. Our occupations are different, the shoes we wear are different, our daily requirements are all different! And our feet are not the same as anyone else's. Even own left and right foot are unique and may have different issues. Each person deserves to have their own questions answered and know that the advice given is tailored to them. So, it is great to get good generic information about a condition, but it's even better when necessary to have your personal and unique questions answered by a trusted professional source. It is our goal to be that source.

17. You invite people to send you questions about their feet to question askthefootdoctor.com. Which questions tend to come up more often?

There are themes to the questions that are most commonly asked. They either have to deal with a painful condition or an injury, a deformity on their foot, a change in appearance of the foot, or how to deal with certain conditions such as fungus toenails or ingrown toenails. People often want information on why they have a bunion or a hammer toe and if surgery is needed. They may want to know about how to treat plantar fasciitis or how to get rid of their heel pain. They want to know if they should see a podiatrist or self-treat. Diabetics want information on how to treat painful neuropathy. Moms want to ask about their kids. Seniors ask about arthritis and how to alleviate painful corns and calluses. The one thing I have found is everyone has a question and just about everyone has a foot problem!

18. There are 250,000 sweat glands in both feet. What advice do you have for people whose feet sweat or have a foot odor? (question modified)

This can be an embarrassing challenge for those that suffer with what is known as hyperhidrosis (excessive sweating) or bromhidrosis (foot odor). Yes, the feet are loaded with sweat glands, an estimated 250,000 per foot, (hard to believe) and unfortunately just like some people may excessively sweat under their arms, others may have overactive sweat glands in the feet often leading to foot odor and really damp socks and shoes by end of day. There are some over-the-counter remedies, but for others a prescription topical agent may be best. Learning about the best socks that absorb moisture will also help. For others there are specific anti-perspirants and products a foot specialist may recommend to eliminate this often messy and embarrassing condition.

19. Some of the proceeds from your book are being donated to a non-profit, Shoes That Fit. What does this organization do – and how can people help it?

I am honored to be donating proceeds from the book to Shoes That Fit. This is a remarkable organization that helps children in need receive new and properly fitted athletic shoes to wear to

school. I would direct everyone to visit their website, shoesthatfit.org to learn more about the amazing work they are doing. Since inception, they have donated over 2 million pairs of new shoes to children and in just 2017 alone, they helped over 120,000 children in need wear new shoes to school! Their long-term goal is that no child should go to school with shoes that don't fit or cause pain. The results are astonishing. There is increased participation in sports, higher attendance, and even better school performance. A truly spectacular mission from Shoes That Fit that can be aided by all of us! It is with great pride that Ask The Foot Doctor can help bring awareness and support to this outstanding not-for-profit, Shoes That Fit.

20. What can seniors do to avoid becoming sedentary because of painful, arthritic feet?

One of my most important personal goals is to keep senior on the move. I always tell my seniors an object in motion stays in motion and an object at rest stays at rest. So, get up and move is the mantra I sing to my patients. I also tell them the quickest way to get old is to be sedentary. Of course, many of my patients tell me when their feet hurt, they hurt all over and it can be difficult to be active with painful feet. So, for those with arthritis or pains or foot pain with walking, we strategize on how to minimize or eliminate some of their aches and pains. This can be through special inserts called orthotics, better and more appropriate shoes, ongoing foot care and helping them get into programs that specialize in senior movement and flexibility classes.

21. The ingrown toenail. Why do so many people get this – and what can be done about it?

Ingrown toenails can be one of those small little things that become this chronically painful recurring nightmare. Ingrown nails spare no ages, from babies to seniors, we see them on everyone. Why? Because nails become injured, they grow awkwardly, they are cut improperly, they get squeezed into shoes and on and on. One of the most common things I hear from a patient is that fixing their ingrown nail changed their life. It is a simple 5 minute, in-office procedure. An ingrown nail can be permanently removed and cauterized to prevent any recurrence. Simple and easy. No need to continue to suffer or be an at-home bathroom surgeon ever again!

22. When should a parent take a child to the podiatrist?

A parent should take their child to the podiatrist for many different reasons. If a child says their feet hurt please get them looked at. If they get night cramps or don't want to walk because their feet hurt, have them looked at. If they trip or stumble or in-toe or out-toe have them looked at. Better sooner than later. Here is the important thing to remember, you as a parent can have peace of mind by getting a quick opinion. One of the more challenging things for a parent is when your child should have been looked at earlier and now they have missed a window for a simpler solution. So as we say, if in doubt, check it out!