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Your feet, like other specialized structures, require specialized care. A doctor of podiatric medicine (D.P.M.) can make an important contribution to your total health, whether it is regular preventive care or surgery to correct a deformity.

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In order to keep your feet healthy, you should be familiar with the most common ills that affect them.

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Remember, though, that self treatment can often turn a minor problem into a major one, and is generally not advisable.



You should see a podiatric physician when any of the following conditions occur or persist:

- ◆ Peripheral neuropathy, a nerve disorder generally characterized by loss of protective sensation and/or tingling and numbness in the feet.
- ◆ Vascular insufficiency, a circulatory disorder which inhibits blood flow to the extremities.
- ◆ Foot deformities, such as hammertoes.
- ◆ Stiff joints.
- ◆ Calluses on the soles of the feet.
- ◆ A history of open sores on the feet (ulcerations), or a previous lower extremity amputation.

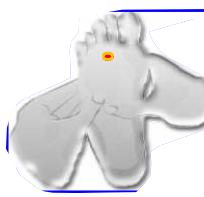
“They key to preventing diabetic foot complications is early recognition and foot screening, at least annually, of at-risk individuals”.



Bunions are misaligned big toe joints which can become swollen and tender. The deformity causes the first joint of the big toe to slant outward, and the big toe to angle toward the other toes. Bunions tend to run in families, but the tendency can be aggravated by shoes that are too narrow in the forefoot and toe. There are conservative and preventive steps that can minimize the discomfort of a bunion, but surgery is frequently recommended to correct the problem.



Ingrown nails are nails whose corners or sides dig painfully into the skin, often causing infection. They are frequently caused by improper nail trimming, but also by shoe pressure, injury, fungus infection, heredity, and poor foot structure. Toenails should be trimmed straight across, slightly longer than the end of the toe, with toenail clippers. If painful or infected, your podiatric physician may remove the ingrown portion of the nail; if the condition reoccurs frequently, your podiatrist may permanently remove the nail.



Neuromas are enlarged, benign growths of nerves, most commonly between the third and fourth toes. They are caused by bones and other tissue rubbing against and irritating the nerves. Abnormal bone structure or pressure from ill-fitting shoes also can create the condition, which can result in pain, burning, tingling, or numbness between the toes and in the ball of the foot. Conservative treatment can include padding, taping, orthotic devices and cortisone injections, but surgical removal of the growth is sometimes necessary.



Hammer, claw, and mallet toes are conditions in which any of the toes are bent in a claw-like position.

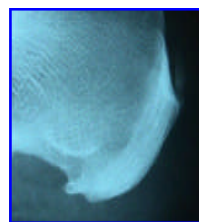


It occurs most frequently with the second toe, often when a bunion slants the big toe toward and under it, but any of the other three smaller toes can be affected. Although the condition usually stems from muscle imbalance, it is often aggravated by ill-fitting shoes or socks that cramp the toes. Avoid pressure on the toes as much as possible. Surgery may be necessary to realign the toes to their proper position.



Warts are caused by a virus, which enters the skin through small cuts and infects the skin. Children, especially teenagers, tend to be more susceptible to warts than adults. Most warts are harmless and benign, even though painful and unsightly. Warts often come from walking barefooted on dirty surfaces or littered ground. There are several simple procedures which your podiatric physician might use to remove warts.

Heel Pain can be caused by a variety of different problems, but the greatest majority is caused by faulty mechanics of the foot. People who are excessively flat footed or who have excessively high arches suffer the most, but anyone can be subject to heel pain. Feet that function poorly from a mechanical standpoint cause too much stress to be placed on the heel bone, ligaments, or nerves in the area. Being overweight can also contribute to the problem. Sometimes general health conditions—such as arthritis, gout, and circulatory problems, for example, may also cause heel pain.



The plantar fascia is a band of tissue underneath the skin on the bottom of the foot that runs all the way from the toes and attaches to the heel bone. Sometimes, when the foot doesn't work well mechanically that band of tissue will pull too hard where it attaches to the heel bone and becomes inflamed and painful. **This is known as plantar fasciitis.**

When the plantar fascia pulls on the heel bone too long, sometimes new bone forms called a heel spur. The heel spur is most often not the cause of heel pain however. Irritation of the plantar fascia is the main culprit.

Treatment is aimed at relieving the excessive pull of the plantar fascia on its attachment to the heel bone. This is often accomplished with an orthotic.



Orthotics are custom made devices that are fabricated from a plaster impression taken of your feet. They can be transferred from shoe to shoe and help to make the foot

function better mechanically. They also rigidly support the arch and thereby prevent the plantar fascia from pulling too hard on the heel bone. Sometimes a cortisone shot or anti-inflammatory medication can be helpful at relieving the symptoms, but do not themselves treat the cause of the problem. Occasionally, when all conservative measures fail, surgery may be indicated.

Orthotics are also helpful in treating a wide range of other foot problems that result from poor mechanical function. Your doctor will determine why your foot function is causing your particular symptoms. Then, by using an orthotic that changes the way your



foot works, the symptoms may be relieved. Flat feet, high arches, hammertoes, neuromas, calluses, bunions, and heel pain are common foot problems that may be helped by changing your foot function. Ankle weakness or frequent sprains are often treated with orthotic devices. Sometimes knee and back pain may be related to abnormal foot function and are relieved by orthotic control.

A Biological Masterpiece

The human foot is a biological masterpiece. Its strong, flexible, and functional design enables it to do its job well and without complaint, if you take care of it and don't take it for granted.

The foot can be compared to a finely tuned race car, or a space shuttle, vehicles whose function dictates their design and structure. And like them, the human foot is complex, containing within its relatively small size 26 bones (the two feet contain a quarter of all the bones in the body), 33 joints, and a network of more than 100 tendons, muscles, and ligaments, to say nothing of blood vessels and nerves.



“There are a number of systemic diseases that are sometimes first detected in the feet, such as diabetes, circulatory disorders, anemia, and kidney problems. Arthritis, including gout, often attacks foot joints first”.

The components of your feet work together, sharing the tremendous pressures of daily living. An average day of walking, for example, brings a force equal to several hundred tons to bear on the feet. This helps explain why your feet are more subject to injury than any other part of your body.

Foot ailments are among the most common of our health problems. Although some can be traced to heredity, many stem from the cumulative impact of a lifetime of abuse and neglect. Studies show that 75 percent of Americans experience foot problems of a greater or lesser degree of seriousness at some time in their lives; nowhere near that many seek medical treatment, apparently because they mistakenly believe that discomfort and pain are normal and expectable.



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**Your Feet:
A Biological
Masterpiece**

Dr. Lawrence Mandel
