



Foot Health Fact Sheet

CHILBLAINS

Did you know...

Chilblains are common, mainly affecting young adults working outdoors in the cold or people who do not wear socks or tights in winter. Elderly people, whose circulation is less efficient, people who don't exercise enough and those suffering from anaemia are also susceptible.

During the onset of winter, susceptible people will experience burning and itching on their hands and feet. Upon entering a warm room, the itching and burning is intensified (not really needed). There may also be some swelling or redness and in extreme cases the surface of the skin may break and sores (ulcers) may develop.

What are chilblains?

Chilblains (also called pernio) are small itchy, red (and sometimes purple) swellings on the skin, which can become increasingly painful, can swell and then dry out leaving cracks in the skin that expose the foot to the risk of infection. They may occur on the toes (particularly the smaller ones), fingers, the face (especially the nose) and the lobes of the ears. They can also occur on areas of the feet exposed to pressure, for instance on a bunion or where the second toe is squeezed by tight shoes. They can also lead to blisters and break down to become a small ulcer prone to infection.

What causes them?

Chilblains develop when the tiny blood vessels under the skin constrict under cold conditions reducing the flow of blood until the area warms up again and causes some leakage of fluid into the surrounding tissue. They are caused by the skin's abnormal reaction to cold but not everyone develops them as this depends to a large extent on the efficiency of your circulation. People with poor circulation and other health problems involving their blood vessels are likely to be more prone to developing chilblains. In addition, damp or draughty conditions, dietary factors and hormonal imbalance can also be contributory factors. It is thought that rapid temperature changes from cold to hot can also be a cause. If the skin is chilled and is then followed by too rapid warming next to a fire or through using a hot water bottle, chilblains may result.

How can I prevent and treat them?

The best way to prevent chilblains is to keep your legs, feet and body warm, especially if your circulation is poor and your mobility is limited.

The whole body, rather than just the feet, needs to be kept warm. Trousers, long boots, tights, leg warmers, long socks and gloves will also help.

If you have developed chilblains try not to scratch them, instead use soothing lotions such as witch hazel and calamine on them to take away most of the discomfort.

If the chilblain has ulcerated, apply an antiseptic dressing. If you have diabetes or are undergoing medical treatment, do have the ulcer assessed by your podiatrist.



Find a podiatrist at foothealthaustralia.org.au

This fact sheet is available as a download from foothealthaustralia.org.au



DO YOU NEED TO SEE A PODIATRIST?



DOES THE FOLLOWING APPLY TO YOU OR YOUR FAMILY?

- Can you only walk for a short period before your feet or legs hurt?
- Do you experience pain in your lower limbs at night?
- Do you experience tingling in your feet?
- Have you noticed your legs or feet are swollen?
- Do you have cuts or fissures on your feet that take a long time to heal?
- Are you returning to sport after an injury?
- Are you uncertain about which running or sports shoe to buy?
- Do you find that you wear out the outside of your shoes quickly?
- Have you noticed your toes poke holes in the top of your shoes?
- Does your forefoot become hot and painful after running or walking?
- Do your hips hurt?
- Has pain in your feet or legs stopped you from exercising?
- Are you worried about your child's feet?
- Do you have arthritis in your feet?
- Do you experience reoccurring gouty attacks?
- Are you worried about the thickness of your nails?
- Do you have discoloured toe nails?
- Are you worried about your foot odour?
- Do your toe nails cause you pain?
- Have you noticed your toes are clawed?
- Do you have hard skin on your feet? Is it getting worse?
- Do you find it hard to cut your own nails?
- Do you find it hard to fit your feet into shoes because of your bunion?

Ticked one or more boxes? Then you need to see a podiatrist.

GO SEE A PODIATRIST BECAUSE...

Podiatrists are Foot Health Experts and understand the structure and movement of your feet and lower limbs.

They can assess, diagnose and treat foot, ankle, knee, leg or hip pain.

Given your feet alone house a quarter of the bones in your entire body, a podiatrist is best placed to get you moving, active or pain-free.

FIND A PODIATRIST NEAR YOU

Head to **foothealthaustralia.org.au** and search by postcode or suburb to find a podiatrist close to you.



Find a podiatrist at **foothealthaustralia.org.au**

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