

Healthy feet

Taking care of your feet is a vital part of a healthy life. Healthy feet are also part of healthy aging. As you get older, mobility becomes more difficult. Also, chronic diseases are a risk for developing foot problems. Good foot care can decrease your pain and prevent infections. Certain chronic diseases, like diabetes and peripheral vascular disease, can cause decreased feeling in your feet. This may delay healing if your feet are injured leading to severe infections. It is important to understand how to take care of your feet if you have these chronic diseases.

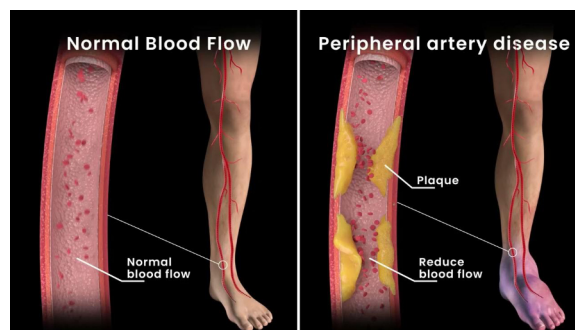
Diabetes is a very common chronic disease in older adults. The numbers of people with diabetes increases with age. Over 29 % of adults 65 years or older have some form of diabetes. Diabetic neuropathy is a common complication of diabetes. Diabetic neuropathy is nerve damage caused by high blood sugar levels. This



from *Managing Diabetic Foot Ulcers* (2024). Advantage Foot & Ankle Center. <https://www.bellpodiatry.com/blogs/item/265-managing-diabetic-foot-ulcers>

nerve damage occurs over time. It can affect your legs and feet, causing burning, tingling pain, or loss of sensation. Loss of feeling in your feet may make you unaware of cuts and sores that can later become infected. Diabetes can also delay healing by decreasing the amount of blood flow to your feet. Some cuts and sores may develop into a severe infection called gangrene. This may lead to amputations to prevent the infection from

spreading to the rest of your body. Above is a picture showing how the infection starts, spreads, and how it can cause damage to your entire foot.



from *Peripheral Artery Disease Angioplasty* [Video]. My Aim Health. (2023). Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf6Kt6f-VCC>

Peripheral vascular disease is another chronic disease that can affect your feet. Also known as peripheral artery disease, this is a condition that affects the blood vessels in your arms and legs. A narrowing or blockage of the blood vessels causes decreased blood flow, usually in your legs and feet. This can lead to painful leg cramping, numbness or tingling, and wounds that are difficult to heal. High cholesterol, high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, and diabetes are risks for peripheral vascular disease.

Decreases in blood flow to the arms or legs yields less oxygen than is needed. This can lead to severe pain, restricted mobility, and amputations in extreme cases.

Gout is an inflammatory disorder that can affect your feet. Gout affects the joints of your body and has flare-ups that can cause severe pain, redness and swelling. Gout



from The Cleveland Clinic (2023). *Gout*. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/4755-gout>

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can occur in any joint, however it largely affects the foot, ankle, and big toe. It occurs when there are elevated levels of uric acid in the body that form crystals around the affected joint. Uric acid comes from the breakdown of food and drinks like alcohol, red meats, organ meats, and certain seafoods like sardines and anchovies. You can lower your risk of a gout flare-up by reducing the uric acid in your blood through diet changes and weight loss.



from *Fungal Toenail Treatment*. (2025). <https://cbfootcare.com/fungal-toenail-treatment>

Fungal infections are another common foot problem among older adults. Fungal infections include toenail fungus and athlete's foot. Over 18 % of people aged 60-79 have toenail fungal infections. Fungal infections thrive in warm damp places such as between the toes or on the feet. Symptoms of athlete's foot include a red, scaly rash and itchiness. Symptoms of toenail fungus include thickened, yellow, or brittle toenails. Chronic conditions such as diabetes and poor circulation are risks for fungal infections. Poor immune function from HIV, cancer, or immunosuppressive medications increases your risk for fungal infections. You can decrease your risk of developing a fungal infection by always wearing shoes in public places, keeping your feet clean and dry, and changing your socks at least once a day or when your feet become sweaty.



from *Athlete's Foot. (Tinea Pedis)* (2021). The Cleveland Clinic. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/22139-athletes-foot-tinea-pedis>

If you or someone you know have either of these chronic diseases it is important to go to a doctor for check-ups. A podiatrist is a foot doctor that can treat all manner of foot problems. Here are some more tips for taking care of your feet at home:

- Wash your feet every day with soap and warm water and dry thoroughly.

- Check your feet every day: Look for cuts and sores, redness, swelling, or blisters. Cover any cuts, sores, or blisters with a bandage.
- Trim your toenails straight across:
 - Do NOT cut along the corners and instead use an emery board to gently smooth the sides. This can prevent you from cutting your skin while you trim.
 - If your toenails are thick, yellow, or are curving and growing into your skin a foot doctor can trim your nails.
 - If you want to get a pedicure at a nail salon, bring your own nail supplies, and request that they thoroughly clean the foot spa before your appointment.
- Protect your feet by always wearing socks and shoes.
 - Do not walk barefoot, as you can step on things and cause cuts and sores. You may be unaware because you do not feel the pain.
 - Check your shoes for pebbles before putting them on.
- Increase the blood flow to your feet.
 - Elevate your feet when you are sitting down.
 - Stop smoking. Call 1-800-QUITNOW or 1-800-784-8669 can connect you with free coaching to quit smoking.
 - Increase your exercise, with activities such as walking, swimming, or bike riding.
- At least once a year have your doctor do a thorough foot exam that includes checking your sensation and pulses.
- Let your doctor know about any symptoms you are having.

Resources to help with paying utility bill

Hospital program support. If you are in the hospital and worried you won't be able to pay your BGE bill, contact a hospital social worker. The social worker will call BGE to delay collection action until you have returned home and recuperated.

Medical Certification. If you or someone in your home has a serious illness or needs medical equipment, you might get a Public Service Commission Medical Certification Form.

- This form tells the utility company that turning off your service could make a serious illness worse or stop you from using important medical equipment.

- A doctor, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant needs to sign the form, and then you send it to the utility company.
- You can access the medical certificate form <https://opc.maryland.gov/Get-Help/Medical-Certification>
- There are video instructions on how to fill out the form or to request a paper copy of the form.

Office of People's Counsel (OPC). OPC get help with your utility bill.

- There is information for setting up payment plans with your utility provider and other helpful information. There also links to apply for resources like the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP). This is a state-run program that helps income-eligible households pay their energy and fuel bills.
- That website with the above resources can be found at <https://opc.maryland.gov/Get-Help/Financial-Help-With-My-Gas-and-Electric-Bill>

Other funding:

- **Fuel Fund:** For those who need help with their energy bills and have already used OHEP or are over income for OHEP. Fuel Fund may be another option. The Fuel Fund of Maryland assists BGE customers with paying their utility bills. For more information about the Fuel Fund or to apply for help, visit <https://fuelfundmaryland.org> or call 410-235-9080 for assistance.
- **211:** 211MD is a 24/7/365 helpline that provides information and referrals to other financial assistance resources in your area. You can contact them in three ways:
 - Dial 2-1-1 or 800-685-0185
 - Search for resources at <https://211md.org/>
 - Email them at info@211md.org

Beat that summer heat with proper hydration!!

We all have experienced a Maryland Summer. Hot, humid, temperatures will soon be here! Staying properly hydrated is super important and can help your body and mind work well even on the hottest days!

Here are some general recommendations:

Everyone has different needs when it comes to being properly hydrated. A good rule of thumb is 1/3rd of your body weight in fluid ounces. Example: If you weigh 120 pounds, aim to drink 40 ounces of water.

Hydration can come from a variety of sources. Include fluids with meals and between bites. Drinks that help

with thirst other than water are milk, juice, soups and broths, and protein and nutritional shakes.

Pay attention to thirst. As we age, our thirst sensation can diminish. It's important to try to drink regularly.

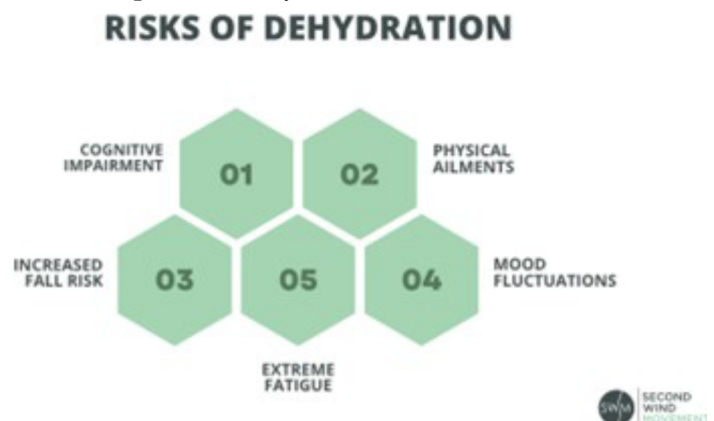
Eat water-rich foods. Water can come from fruits and vegetables like watermelon, cucumbers, leafy vegetables (such as lettuce, spinach, kale) and strawberries!

Drink a full glass of water with medications. This helps ensure that medications are properly absorbed. Some medications increase risk of dehydration.

Add flavor to water. Try adding lemon, cucumber, or berries to make water more appealing. Great tips. How do I know if I am drinking enough? Sure thing, here are some warning signs that mean you need to drink more fluids!!!

1. **Dark Urine:** Dark yellow or amber-colored urine may indicate dehydration.
2. **Thirst:** Increased thirst, often accompanied by a dry mouth, is a common early sign.
3. **Fatigue:** Dehydration can lead to feelings of tiredness and low energy levels.

Addressing these signs by increasing fluid intake is essential to prevent dehydration.



Referral guide

The HANDLS Referral Guide has numerous resources in Baltimore City including health care, mental health, substance abuse services, social services, vision and dental discounts and programs, pharmacy assistance and more! To access our HANDLS Referral Guide go to <https://handls.nih.gov/ReferralGuide-2023-05-26.pdf>.

Contacting HANDLS

If you'd like to be added to the HANDLS email list, please message us at handls@mail.nih.gov.



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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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Newsletter for the HANDLS community

The purpose of this study is to learn about changes in health over time. Using our medical research vehicles, we want to study as many people with different backgrounds as we can. We want this study to help us understand healthy aging by examining the influences of different backgrounds on changes in health over time. The information we gather will help improve health and prevent disabilities. Our goal is to gather information to improve health and prevent disabilities for people of all backgrounds, particularly in minority communities and communities with limited resources.

For information about our study call 877-677-9538 or visit our website <https://handls.nih.gov>.