This leaflet is endorsed by The Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists.

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Looking after your feet is one of the most important aspects of personal health care, whatever your age. During your lifetime, your feet could walk the equivalent of four times around the world! To make sure that your feet stay fit, you need to look after them, keeping them clean, warm and well supported.

**Trouble with your feet?**

Generally our feet serve us well, but they are subjected to a lot of stress and strain. Wearing shoes which don't fit properly, walking on hard pavements or even just standing still can all take their toll on your feet.

Never ignore minor foot troubles. They may not seem to matter very much at the time, but can get worse unless you seek proper attention and treatment.

Symptoms such as persistent pain, soreness or redness are warning signs. If, for example, you neglect a corn or a bunion, it can develop and become more painful. Then you may start walking badly to avoid the pain and that can lead to more serious problems.

**Always attend to foot problems quickly; this will save you discomfort in the future.**

**Looking after your feet**

**Buying new shoes**

When buying new footwear, it is important to bear in mind the following points.

- It is essential that shoes, boots and
slippers fit properly and allow your feet to breathe.

- There should always be a half-inch gap between the ends of your toes and the ends of the shoes. They should fit snugly at both the heel and the instep. The shoes should have a fastening such as a strap or laces which will help to keep your heel to the back of the shoe and stop your toes getting squashed.

- Make sure the shoes are wide enough. The widest part of your feet should rest in the widest part of the shoe.

- As you get older, the size and shape of your feet may change so always have your feet measured when buying new shoes. If possible, stay standing while your feet are measured. When you try on a new pair of shoes, make sure you stand up and walk around in them. Try walking on a hard surface as well as on a carpet so you can check how well the shoes cushion your feet.

- Make sure that you feel safe and secure when you walk, and that the shoes you choose protect and support your feet. Most people want firm non-slip soles, but if you have difficulty lifting your feet you may need soles that let your feet slide over surfaces.

- Look for footwear which has soft supple uppers of leather or fabric. Avoid shoes with a lot of decorative stitching which can stop the shoe from stretching over a bunion or raised toe. Feel around inside the shoes to make sure that there are no seams or stitching to rub your feet.

- Make sure that you can get the shoes on and
off by yourself; a shoe horn with a long handle could help. If you find laces difficult you could try footwear with Velcro fastenings.

• Choose slippers with high sides and firm soles which enclose the heel. A strap or flap fastening allows the slipper to be adjusted to fit your foot exactly. Wash your slippers regularly and try not to wear the same pair all the time.

• When buying new shoes be sure to take the time you need to decide if they are suitable. Don’t be rushed into buying shoes that you’re not sure about, or ones you haven’t tried on. More expensive shoes are not always better for your feet - choosing a pair of shoes is all about what is most suitable for you.

• It is often a good idea to buy shoes in the afternoon, particularly if your feet swell during the day. Shoes that fit well in the morning may become too tight by the evening. You may find it easier to try on shoes in your own home and in your own time. There are many mail order companies which supply a wide range of footwear. Before ordering your shoes, check that you can exchange them or get a refund if they are uncomfortable.

**Socks, stockings and garters**

Make sure that socks and stockings fit you properly and aren’t too tight. Don’t wear two pairs of socks in shoes which already fit and avoid tight garters as these can reduce the circulation of blood to your ankles and feet. Change your socks and stockings every day.

If you suffer from varicose veins, you need to take special care of your legs. Support hosiery can relieve the symptoms of
tired aching legs and prevent varicose veins from getting worse. Graduated support hosiery is made tighter at the ankle to encourage blood to flow back up the leg towards the heart. If your doctor feels that you would benefit from support stockings, you may be able to get them on prescription through the NHS.

A few simple tips to help varicose veins and relieve aching legs are given below.

- Try to avoid knocks and grazes.
- Keep your weight within normal limits.
- Put your feet up when you can.
- Spend a few minutes each day circling your ankles and curling your toes.
- Do not cross your legs while sitting.
- Avoid popsocks or hold-ups with tight elastic.

**Simple foot care**

Keeping your feet clean is very important and is the main way of preventing infections. Wash your feet every day in warm soapy water. Rinse them well and dry them gently with a soft towel, taking particular care to dry between the toes.

To stop patches of hard, dead skin building up, use a chiropody sponge or pumice stone now and again. You can get these from chemists’ shops; ask your chemist for advice on which product to use, particularly if you are diabetic.