

Happy Feet

Flip-flops are fun in the sun and perfect poolside, but they don't offer much support and could lead to problems if you wear them too much.

Put your best feet forward this summer with these tips

➤ In summertime, the living's easy—but not for your feet. Between the heat, outdoor activities, flimsy flip-flops, and sweaty socks, no other season poses greater risk to your foot health. Alexej Barg, M.D., an orthopedic foot and ankle surgeon at University of Utah Health Care's South Jordan Health Center, offers these tips for keeping your feet healthy all summer long.

Size Up Your Shoes

A key to foot health is "very simple but very difficult at the same time: Have the right shoes," Barg says. Foot pain and blisters signal that something is wrong—with the fit of the shoe or, perhaps, with the foot.

Athletic shoes need to be replaced at least once a year, Barg says, as their cushioning begins to wane. If shoe soles show asymmetric wear, **see an orthopedic surgeon**, who will examine the feet for structural

problems and may recommend wearing insoles. Don't buy your own, Barg cautions: "If you pick the wrong shoe insoles, you may actually worsen the problem."



Stay Dry

Besides keeping shoes fresh, socks serve another key purpose: absorbing sweat, which helps prevent blisters by reducing friction between the shoe and foot. Apply foot powder before activity. After showering use a towel to dry your feet, especially between your toes. Wet feet can also affect your body temperature, which can cause more sweating—and more blisters.

If you develop a blister, **be patient**: Trying to remove it can cause an infection. "Underneath, you have highly vulnerable skin that is very, very painful," Barg says. If the blister doesn't fade within a day or two, see your family physician or a foot specialist.



FIND A FOOT FIX

Orthopedic surgeons don't just perform surgery. They can evaluate your feet for problems or deformities, recommend footwear, and more. To make an appointment at the South Jordan Health Center, call **801-213-8838**.

Get a Proper Pedicure

Pretty toes can come at a price if pedicures aren't performed safely. Be sure that your salon cleans the foot bath between customers and uses different, sterilized tools for manicures and pedicures to avoid transferring bacteria and fungus. To keep things even cleaner, bring your own pedicure tools.

Avoid pedicures when you have foot wounds, which raise your risk of infection. And never round the edges of your nails with clippers. "This is one of the most important risk factors for ingrown nails, which can be very painful and may even require surgery to address," Barg says.

Treat Your Feet Right

Make feet the last-but-not-least part of your body by caring for them proactively. Prevent injuries by doing simple foot exercises two or three times a day, Barg says. Roll a golf ball under your foot; use your toes to pick up marbles; loop a towel around the ball of your foot and pull to stretch the foot and calf.

Stay hydrated to minimize swelling and soak swollen feet in a cool bath that contains Epsom salt. And because the skin on your feet is susceptible to skin cancer, don't forget to apply sunscreen from head to toe—literally.

➤ DEALING WITH AN INJURY?

Schedule an evaluation with a sports medicine specialist at the South Jordan Health Center at **801-213-8838**.

Go Easy on the Flip-Flops ...

If your feet are healthy, you can wear flip-flops—in moderation, Barg says. People with structural issues such as flat feet shouldn't wear flip-flops, which don't provide the necessary shock absorption and support for arches and heels. [What do you expect from a half-inch-thick piece of rubber?]

At worst, wearing the sandals can lead to overuse injuries, like stress fractures in the metatarsal bones on the top of the foot or plantar fasciitis, a stabbing heel pain caused by inflammation of the tissue on the bottom of the foot. And flip-flop injuries aren't limited to the feet: Research has shown that people shorten their stride while wearing flip-flops, which can have detrimental effects on the legs, knees, and back.

... Unless You're at the Pool



Flip-flops are made for the pool—because athlete's foot is, too. The infection that leads to dry, itchy skin is caused by a fungus, which thrives in warm, wet places like pools and locker rooms.

Although it's tempting to go barefoot after months of boot weather, **opt for sandals or shoes** at the pool and in the backyard. Shoes protect the feet from being exposed to conditions like plantar warts and hazards that can cause cuts and puncture wounds.