

Weekend Doctor

By **DR. THOMAS F. VAIL**

Feet are the Rodney Dangerfield of body parts: "They don't get no respect!" That's especially true for men's feet.

Men's feet and ankles take a beating with jobs that often require long hours standing or walking on hard surfaces such as concrete. Men often resist going to the doctor when they're sick or in pain until it starts slowing them down.

This Valentine's Day, think of your husband's feet. Despite what many men tell themselves, foot pain is not normal. Here are my top 10 men's foot problems:

- Heel pain is often caused by tissue inflammation, but can also result from a broken bone, a tight Achilles tendon, a pinched nerve or other problem. A qualified physician will know how to diagnose and treat the true cause of heel pain. Usually, heel pain is plantar fasciitis and this is successfully treated with conservative treatments by your physician.

- Ankle sprains always, always, always require a prompt visit to the doctor. Participating in sports activities is one way men can get a sprained ankle, but even day-to-day activities such as walking on an uneven surface or slipping on an icy sidewalk can produce the painful stretching or tearing of the ankle ligament.

- Hallux Rigidus, or big toe stiffness and pain, develops slowly over time as cartilage in the big toe joint wears down. This eventually leads to arthritis. The sooner a man has this diagnosed, the easier it is to treat.

Golfers may develop it as a result of the motion of the foot during the follow-through of the swing, and other men may have jobs that increase the stress on the big toe, such as those requiring frequent stooping or squatting.

- Achilles tendonitis usually develops from a sudden increase in physical activity, such as when unconditioned men play weekend sports. Chances of an Achilles tendon rupture can be reduced by treatment of the symptoms of Achilles tendonitis: pain and tenderness on the back of the foot or heel. These problems are also common in men whose work puts stress on their ankles and feet, such as laborers.

- Ingrown toenails can pierce the skin, open the door for bacteria to enter the body, and convince some men to perform dangerous "bathroom surgery." Few men know that a doctor can perform a quick procedure that will end the pain and permanently cure an ingrown toenail.

- Toe and metatarsal fractures (broken toes). Some people say that "the doctor can't do anything for a broken bone in the foot." This is usually not true. In fact, if a fractured toe or metatarsal bone is not treated correctly, serious complications may develop.

- Athlete's foot is a chronic infection caused by various types of fungus. Athlete's foot is often spread in places where men go barefoot such as public showers or swimming pools.

The condition ranges from mild scaling and itching to painful inflammation and blisters. It usually starts between the toes or on the arch and may spread to the bottom and sides of the foot.

- Onychomycosis, or fungal nails, refers to any number of fungal infections that can occur on the nails of the feet. I see a lot of men with this condition due to sweaty feet, poor hygiene and tight fitting shoes.

Fungus that occurs on nails is usually more resistant and more difficult to treat than athlete's foot, so physician formula topical or oral antifungal medications may be prescribed.

- Foot warts are harmless, even though they may be painful. Men often mistake warts for corns or calluses, which are layers of dead skin that build up to protect an area which is being continuously irritated. A wart, however, is caused by a viral infection which invades the skin through small or invisible cuts and abrasions. Foot warts are generally raised and fleshy and can appear anywhere on the foot or toes.

If the man in your life has any of these symptoms, let him know it is not normal and he should see a podiatrist. If caught early, most of the above conditions can be treated very successfully.



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