

Weekend Doctor

By DR. THOMAS F. VAIL

Gemma Arterton, Drew Carey, Halle Berry, Oprah Winfrey, Maria Sharapova, Jimmy Cliff, Anne Boleyn, Liam Gallagher, Antonio Alfonseca, Kate Hudson and Taye Diggs are rumored, thought, or seen, to have 11 toes, usually an extra pinky toe.

Another term for extra toe or finger is polydactyly. It originates from the Greek words *polys* and *dactylos*, or many fingers, or medically, too many fingers or toes.

Polydactyly of the feet is a rare, congenital condition present from birth on one or both feet. It is usually defined as a supernumerary digit on the outside aspect of the foot, but is classified into three main groups: radial, or preaxial; ulnar, or postaxial; and central.

In postaxial polydactyly, which accounts for 80 percent of all cases, the extra digit is located on the far side of the hand or foot, next to the little toe or finger.

In cases of preaxial polydactyly, the extra toe or finger is on the radial side, near the thumb or big toe.

Central polydactyly, in which the extra digit is located between the others, is far less common.

A person with polydactyly of the feet may have a fully functional extra toe, complete with nerve endings, bones, and even joints. Or, the extra digit may be just a fleshy, boneless nub.

The condition can be bilateral, that is, each foot has an extra toe, or unilateral, that is, only one foot has an extra toe. Roughly 50 percent of cases are bilateral.

In rare cases, there may even be more than one extra toe. The record for greatest number of digits belongs to Akshat Saxena of India, who in 2010 was born with 34 of them, seven fingers on each hand and 10 toes on each foot.

Perhaps more famous, if less astounding, is the case of actor and comedian Drew Carey, whose 1997 autobiography, "Dirty Jokes and Beer: Stories of the Unrefined," reveals that he was born with six toes on his right foot.

A good rule of thumb is if the extra toe does not bother you, leave it alone!

However, if you experience walking pain or intermittent pain at rest, calluses between the normal and extra toe from excessive rubbing in the close proximity, and swollen toes, seek medical help.

Polydactyly of the feet, or hands, is genetic. It is very uncommon, being present in only one out of every 1,000 live births.

For reasons that are not well understood, this condition is considerably more prevalent among African-Americans, among whom it appears in four or more out of every 1,000 live births. Male children are slightly more likely than females to have extra toes or fingers.

Polydactyly can be associated with Bardet-Biedl Syndrome, Meckel-Gruber Syndrome, Down Syndrome and McKusick-Kaufman Syndrome. The extra digit could be caused from predisposition or congenital malformation at birth.

How do you diagnose polydactyly? You do not need X-rays to diagnose the extra digit. Clinically, patients will be able to see or feel the extra digit. However, X-rays will help guide surgeons when deciding how to surgically correct the extra digit.

What are the treatments for polydactyly? Initially, Tylenol or Ibuprofen, or icing, can help reduce the swelling, pain and inflammation. Sometimes, taping both the normal and extra toes can be helpful.

The extra digit serves no functional purpose. Cosmetically, surgeons take in great considerations when performing the amputation. Patients might notice a slight scar.

In many cases, polydactyly of the feet causes no health problems, and many people who are born with an extra toe live out their lives with it. But, if you do have shoe fitting problems or foot pain because of it, your podiatrist can help.



Vail

Vail is with Advanced Footcare Clinic, Findlay. Questions for Blanchard Valley Health System experts may be sent to Weekend Doctor, The Courier, P.O. Box 609, Findlay, OH 45839.