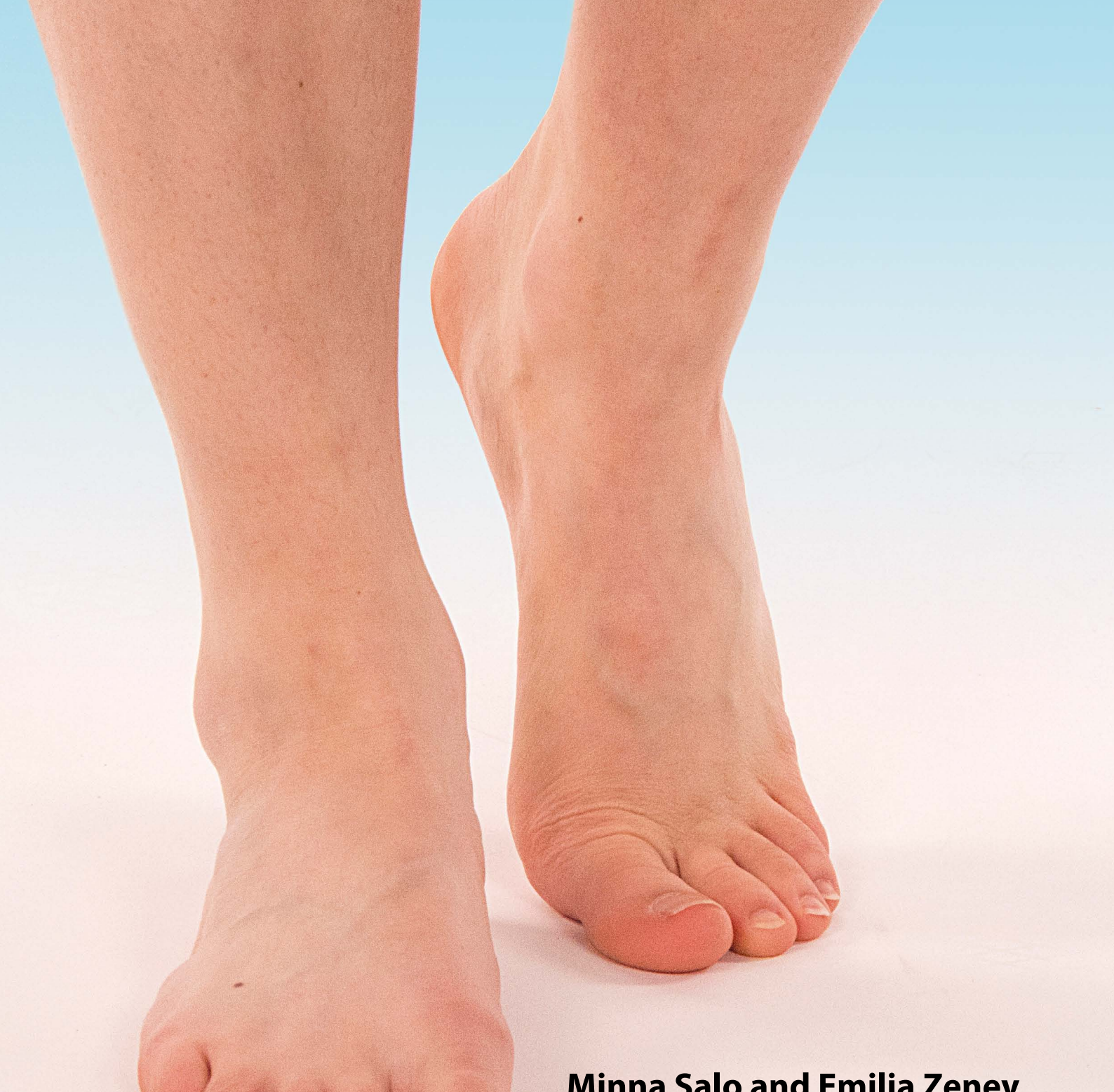

Minna Salo and Emilia Zenev

Guide for foot self-care

Table of contents

Introduction	*1*
Foot health	*2*
Foot health for people with Meretoja disease	*2*
Self-care of the feet	*3*
Skin of the feet	*3*
Foot skin care	*4*
Toenails	*5*
Toenail care	*5*
Self-care products for foot	*6*
Cutting nails	*9*
Nail fungus treatment	*9*
The role of footwear in foot health	*10*
Shoes	*10*
Criteria for good footwear	*11*
Socks	*12*
Physical activity for functional capacity	*13*
Exercise for the lower limb muscles	*14*
Squatting exercise	*14*
Exercise with a chair	*15*
Pelvic lift with the back on the floor	*16*
Strengthening the muscles of the calves	*16*
Balance	*19*
Help from a podiatrist for foot care and foot health	*19*
Useful links	*20*

You can do a lot yourself

This foot care guide is intended to support foot care for people with Meretoja disease and promote their foot health.

The content of the guide was produced by Minna Salo and Emilia Zenev, who graduated as podiatrists from Metropolia University of Applied Sciences in December 2017. The foot care guide is part of their podiatry thesis on foot health for people with Meretoja disease. The aim of the thesis was to increase knowledge about the foot health of people with Meretoja disease and to produce a foot self-care guide based on the collected information.

The guide contains information on foot health in general as well as information specifically about foot health for people with Meretoja disease. The guide provides guidance on proper foot care, starting from the basics. It explains how to use various foot care products, such as aids and creams, the criteria for suitable shoes and the characteristics of good socks, among other things. The aim is to provide as many new and good tips as possible to promote good foot health and motivate people to take good care of their feet.

Tips on how to maintain and improve foot function and balance on your own can be found at the end of the guide, which provides easy gymnastic exercises suitable for home use.

Minna Salo and Emilia Zenev

The Finnish Amyloidosis Association thanks Minna Salo and Emilia Zenev for their excellent cooperation and for their valuable work for people with Meretoja disease by researching their foot health and produce the contents of this guide.

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The Finnish Amyloidosis Association

Matti Haimi
Chairman

Foot health

Foot health is an important part of overall health throughout life. Foot health is based on normal structure and function of the lower limbs and feet, and pain-free feet with intact skin and healthy nails. Foot health has a significant impact on mobility, functional ability, and quality of life. Good foot health promotes functional ability and an active life. The basis for good foot health is proper foot care. Self-care refers to self-treatment and the choices you make to promote foot health. General health, many long-term illnesses, obesity, work, and exercise are also factors affecting foot health. Ageing and certain diseases can affect the ability to function, the condition of the feet and the ability to take care of them. Varied movement, standing and sitting during the day all contribute to foot health. Fat and sugar metabolism, energy expenditure and vascular structure are improved and swelling in the legs is reduced by avoiding more than half an hour of continuous sitting.

Foot health for people with Meretoja disease

People with Meretoja disease have been found to have changes in foot posture, uneven loading of the soles of the feet, changes in the sensation in the feet, and changes in balance and gait. The neuropathy associated with the disease can cause walking difficulties, and muscle weakness of limb. The limbs may also experience loss of vibration and posture, fine motor clumsiness, tingling, swelling and numbness. People with the disease may also suffer from cold feet, varicose veins, restless legs, and rest pain in the lower limbs. For the lower limbs, the most obvious impairment is loss of balance. General poor foot care can affect the foot health of people with the disease.

A major symptom of Meretoja disease is dry skin. People with the disease have more dry skin, skin damage and bruising than normal. There is also a higher incidence of thinning of the skin, itching, reduced hairiness and reduced or no hair. People with the disease also have calluses on the soles of their feet and cracks in their heels. People with Meretoja disease may also suffer from thickened toenails.

The basic creams from the pharmacy are best for the soles of the feet, and the type of greasiness of the cream depends on the skin type. For calluses and cracks, greasier creams are needed.

Self-care of the feet

The well-being of your feet affects your daily mobility and quality of life. Regular and correct foot care is a prerequisite for the well-being of your feet. Daily physical activity can put several hundred tonnes of load on the feet and a person can take up to 8,000-15,000 steps a day, walking around the world 3-4 times in their lifetime. This is why feet need careful and regular care.

The skin of the feet

The role of the skin on your feet is to protect your body from potential external stimuli. Although the skin on the soles of your feet is up to six times as thick as the rest of your skin, it needs regular care to stay in good condition and withstand the stress and strain on your body. Taking care of foot hygiene is a good basis for treating the skin on your feet. Combined with daily foot lubrication, it provides the best protection against infections and skin damage caused by mechanical stress. The skin on your feet, especially the skin between your toes, should be checked every day. A skin rash between the toes can act as a gateway to infections.

The most common changes in the skin of the feet are hyperkeratosis, cracks, calluses, corns, warts, blisters, skin rashes, excessive sweating, and fungal infections. These can be caused by misalignment of the feet, biomechanical abnormalities, fractures, certain diseases (the most common being diabetes and rheumatism) and ageing. Excess weight, standing and excessive or improper strain and inappropriate self-care can also cause skin changes.

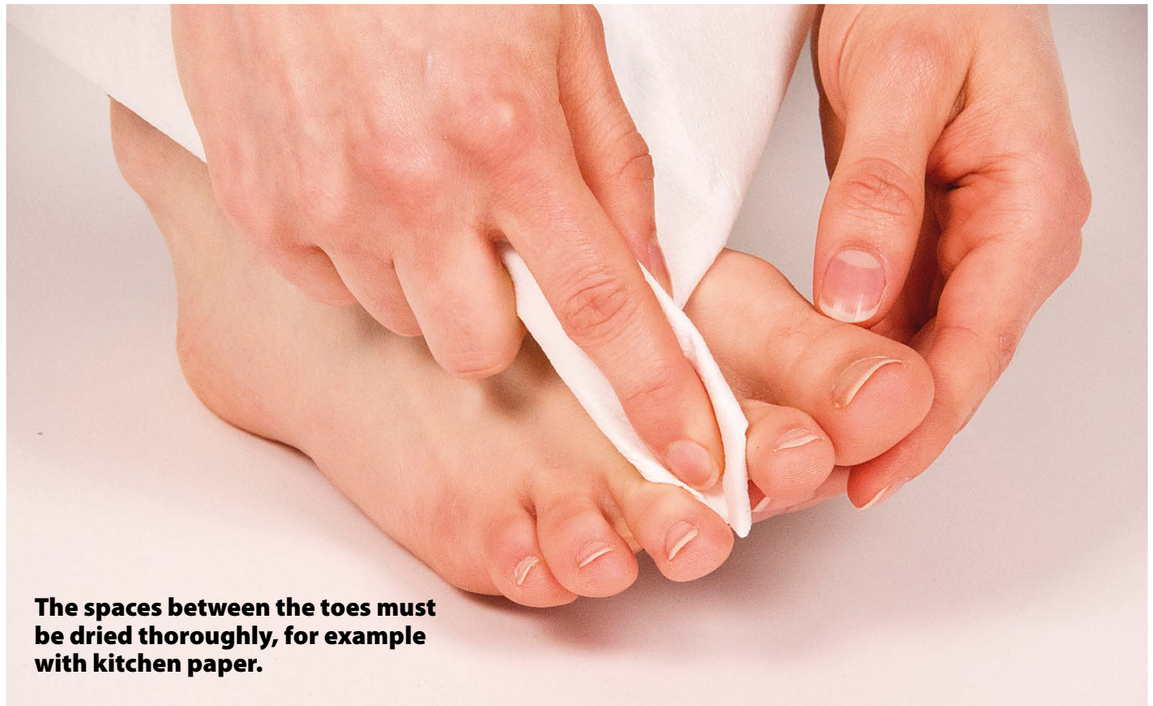
The skin care of the feet

Daily care of the skin on your feet includes washing, drying, lubricating, and checking. To clean your feet, just wash them with lukewarm water, which is enough to remove sweat, dead skin, and sock dirt from the skin. For example, if there is visible dirt on your feet from gardening, you can use a soft brush and an acidic detergent with a PH close to that of your skin (3.5-5.5). For very dry skin, a base cream can be used instead of a detergent to prevent drying of the skin caused by the detergent. After washing the feet, dry them thoroughly, avoiding rubbing the feet. Particular attention is paid to drying the toes so that they do not act as a moist breeding ground for possible infections. You can use, for example, kitchen paper to dry the toes.

After washing and drying, the feet and legs are moisturised with a cream according to the skin type. The cream should be oily enough to be absorbed through thicker skin if necessary. Moisturising is most effective immediately after washing and drying, when clean, soft skin absorbs the cream more effectively and retains moisture better. The cream is rubbed into the skin in a circular motion, especially in areas of hardening, for several seconds. No fat is applied between the toes to prevent the skin from breaking down and becoming a breeding ground for infections. It's also a good idea to grease your nails and cuticles regularly to keep them flexible.

Removing skin lesions on the feet with different types of foot scrapers, poles or pumice stones is not recommended for regular use, as they can easily damage the skin. Excessive repeated mechanical abrasion can accelerate and maintain the growth of, for example, hardening. If you wish to use these self-care products, it is recommended that you do so no more than once a month. It would be safer to use an exfoliating cream or a soft towel once a week in the shower, for example, to remove dead skin cells. Both the exfoliating cream and the towel are used to treat skin changes with gentle circular movements. Footbaths are also not recommended for frequent use to avoid excessive drying and softening of the skin. A suitable foot bath is once every two weeks.

If you suspect a fungal infection on your skin, non-prescription creams and gels for fungal infections are available from pharmacies. For example, Lamisil, Canesten and Daktarin are pharmacy products for the topical treatment of fungal infections. The suitability of products should always be checked with the pharmacy staff or doctor.



The spaces between the toes must be dried thoroughly, for example with kitchen paper.

Toenails

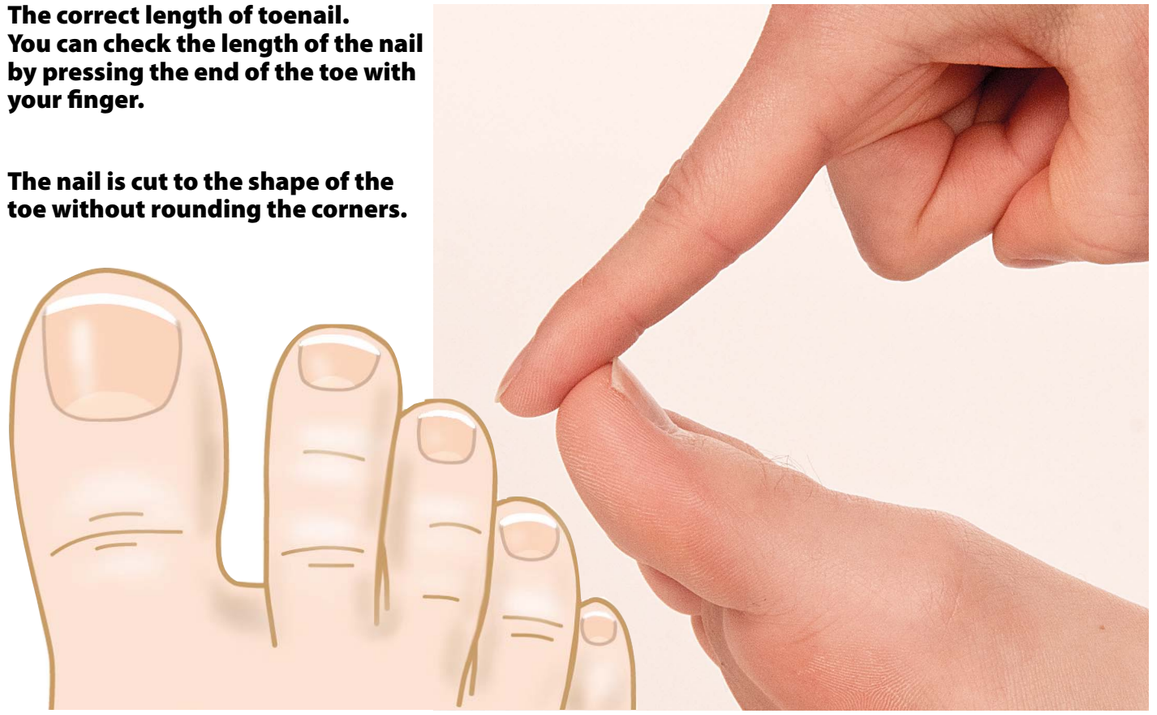
The function of the toenails is to protect the tips of the toes from rubbing and pressure. The nail of a healthy toe is an elastic and dense horny plate about 0.5-1 mm thick. A healthy nail is flexible, shiny and translucent. The most common nail changes in toenails are discolouration of the nail plate, changes in the shape or texture of the nail, nail shedding and nail bed inflammation. The most common form of deformation is ingrown nail and the most common structural changes are nail fungus.

Toenail care

The most important treatment for toenails is to shorten them regularly. Nails are cut every 2-6 weeks, depending on the growth rate of the nail. The nail is cut to the shape of the toe

The correct length of toenail. You can check the length of the nail by pressing the end of the toe with your finger.

The nail is cut to the shape of the toe without rounding the corners.



without rounding the corners. The length of the nail is correct when its free edge is felt on the finger when the end of the toe is pressed. Nails are cut with personal straight-bladed scissors or cutters. Personal instruments are used to avoid the spread of possible infections. It is a good idea to cut your nails immediately after washing, so they are softer and more flexible. If necessary, the cut surfaces are smoothed lightly with a nail file. If there is a build-up of sock lint or dirt on the nail beds, you can clean them with a soft nail brush, starting from the root and working towards the tip Regular lubricating of nails and cuticles improves their flexibility, prevents dryness and makes it easier to trim thick nails.

A rule of thumb for toenail care:

- **Personal nail care equipment**
- **Shortening your nails regularly**
- **Shortened to the shape of the toe and nail**
- **The right nail length is felt on the finger when the end of the toe is pressed lightly**
- **Smoothing of edges and cutting surface with a file, if necessary**
- **If necessary, gently cleaning the nail roots with a soft brush**
- **Moisturising or oiling your nails**

Self-care products for feet

A key part of foot self-care products is a cream for your skin type. The most suitable for the soles of the feet are basic creams from the pharmacy and the type of skin will determine the oiliness of the cream. If you have dry skin and calluses on the soles of your feet, you need an oily base cream with a 60-70% fat content. Oily creams include ApoBase Oily Creme and Decubal Repair Cream. Only a greasy cream can effectively soften calluses on the foot. Cracks in the skin on the soles of the feet also need a greasy cream that protects the skin. For example, CeraDerm cream is a good treatment for cracks. There are also several proprietary lubricants for cracks. If the skin on the soles of your feet is in good condition, a medium-fat ApoBase Creme or Decubal Clinic Cream with a fat content of 30-40% is sufficient. For dry and itchy leg skin, a soothing Xyliderm gel is best, while it contains Xylitol to bind moisture and repair damaged skin. For sensitive and damaged skin on the legs, CeraDerm skin oil is also suitable to protect and moisturise the skin.

A rule of thumb for daily care of the skin on your feet:

- **Washing feet with lukewarm water**
- **After washing, dry the feet and between the toes thoroughly and gently.**
- **Drying involves checking the condition of the skin, toenails and fingernails.**
- **Moisturise immediately after washing.**
- **A cream with sufficient fat content for the soles of the feet**
- **Apply the cream in a circular motion to the hardened areas.**
- **No lubrication between the toes to avoid chafing**
- **Incubation between the toes is a gateway to infections**

A range of foot care products can help improve foot health. In the picture above left, a calf adjuster, a big toe adjuster, below a shin pad and toe protection tubes.

Important self-care products for the feet include various aids such as insoles, orthoses, protectors and supports. There are many different types of insoles available in grocery stores today, each with a different function. Felt insoles keep your feet warm in winter. Odour-absorbing and moisturising insoles keep skin dry. Shock-absorbing insoles that balance the load on the soles of the feet add extra softness to the shoes and can even treat mild foot pain. Changing the insoles regularly will improve the hygiene of your shoes and can extend their life. Podiatrists make customised supports that can correct foot posture problems, balance load, relieve pressure and alleviate lower limb pain.

A variety of ready-made anterior and posterior foot orthoses are available from pharmacies and grocery stores to treat mild foot posture changes. Mild and mobile Hallux valgus (bunions) can be treated with a big

Insoles can be used to even out the load on the soles of the feet and absorb shocks.

toe orthosis. Mild and mobile hammertoe can be treated with a hammertoe corrector. A shin pad or guard can compensate for pain caused by atrophy of the fat pad in the shin and excessive strain on the bones of the shin. Heel padding can be used to treat atrophy of the heel fat pad and various heel pain conditions.

Skin chafing caused by changes in posture can be treated with a variety of protectors.

A rule of thumb for foot self-care products:

- **Sufficiently oily cream**
- **Get help from a podiatrist to choose products**
- **Insoles, orthoses, straighteners, springs**
- **Protectors, cushions**
- **Sheep's wool**

Sheep's wool, FleecyWeb, bladder patch

Telescopic research mirror for monitoring the condition of the soles of the feet and toes.

Sheep's wool effectively prevents chafing between the toes and FleecyWeb gently protects the skin. Sheep's wool is loosely woven between the toes to form loops.

Cutters and glass files for nail maintenance.

The skin in the Hallux valgus area can be protected from rubbing by shoes with a Hallux valgus patch or a protective tube. To protect the skin around the hammertoe area, cut-out protective tubes are suitable, which are worn around the toe. For different types of easily chafed skin, various adhesive skin protectors such as the Mills FleeceWeb skin protector are suitable. Skin protectors are an effective way to prevent chafing of the Hallux valgus, hammertoe and heel skin caused by shoes. Adhesive shields should only be used on intact skin. If the skin is already chafed only products designed to protect broken skin should be used. To prevent the skin between the toes from chafing, it's a good idea to use sheep's wool, available at the pharmacy, as it effectively draws moisture away from the skin and prevents it from chafing and breaking. Sheep's wool is loosely tucked between the toes, but not wrapped around the toes. A blister patch can be used to treat blisters and chafings or to prevent blisters from forming in the first place. However, patches can easily irritate sensitive skin, and it is better to use a protection designed for sensitive and thin skin.

Cutting nails

Important self-care products for nails include the right nail clippers and a glass file. Nail cutters should be straight-edged side cutters. The glass file can be used to thin a thickened nail, smooth the cut surface of the nail, and soften any sharp corners.

Nail fungus treatment

If you suspect nail fungus, a resin lacquer is available from your pharmacy, and its antibacterial ingredients may be effective against mild to moderate nail fungus. Nailner and Nalox nail fungus treatments can also act as topical treatments for nail fungus infections. The condition of your nails can also be checked by a podiatrist, who will refer you to a doctor and a fungicide, if neces-

sary, for an internal course of medication to treat any nail fungus.

The role of footwear in foot health

Footwear selection is also an important part of foot health and foot care. In fact, the main cause of foot pain and discomfort is unsuitable footwear. The shoe is often too short, too narrow at the heel, too high heeled, too narrow or too low at the toe. Shoes that promote good foot health are not always easy to find in shoe shops and the selection can be very limited. In addition, feet swell by about 5% during the day, so the best time to buy new shoes is usually in the afternoon at the earliest. Everyone's feet are individual and need the right footwear for them.

Shoes

The purpose of the shoe is to protect the foot from external factors, support the foot, absorb shocks and reduce friction against the skin. Suitable shoes promote normal foot function, good postural control and allow the feet to function as naturally as possible. Appropriate footwear reduces foot pain, improves circulation to the lower limbs, improves walking, enhances safe mobility, promotes overall health and even increases quality of life. In the right size shoes, the load on the soles of the feet is evenly distributed, balance is stabilised, and walking speed is increased. On the contrary, an unsuitable shoe can impair balance control and increase the risk of falling. Shoes that are too narrow commonly cause foot pain and are associated with Hallux valgus and, while shoes that are too short can contribute to the development of hammertoes. Studies have shown that people wearing high heels have more Hallux valguses and calluses in the soles of their feet. Feet can change throughout life and the same footwear is rarely suitable throughout life.

Criteria for good footwear

- Sufficient length, width and tip height
- Straight at the last and rounded or square at the tip
- Adjustable fixing
- Low and wide heal
- Sturdy heel cup
- Suitable for the season
- Durable outsole
- Thin, flexible and twistable base
- Removable inner sole
- Lightweight

Criteria for good footwear

Regularly used footwear should meet the criteria of a good shoe. However, a shoe that meets the criteria of good footwear is not suitable for everyone. It is important to take into account the specific shoe criteria for specific groups and to remember that feet change with age and the same shoe will not fit all your life. A good shoe is made of skin-friendly and breathable material. Shoes should always be chosen according to the season, so that they are warm in winter and cool in summer. In rainy weather, footwear is recommended to be made of water-resistant material.

Most people walk in shoes of the wrong size or shape. In terms of length, the foot normally needs 1.2-1.5 cm of walking room in the shoe, measured from the longest toe, to function properly. There should also be enough tip height to allow enough room for the toes to move sideways and upwards without rubbing. The width should also be sufficient so that the shoe does not compress the foot and press the toes together or hinder the normal function of the foot when moving.

Good footwear can be adjusted with straps, thongs or stickers. This will also make the shoe fit better, depending on any swelling of the feet. The criteria for a suitable shoe are a sufficiently wide and straight toe in the shape of the foot and a round or square toe. Many shoes have a banana-shaped last, which causes the front of the foot to turn inwards incorrectly, and a tip that is too narrow, causing toe misalignment and pain.

The most important criterion for the outer

A variety of shoe models. A good shoe should have a straight toe, a round or square toe, a wide and low heel. Your podiatrist can help you choose the right footwear.

sole of a shoe is its grip in slippery conditions. The sole of the shoe should be flexible, twistable, elastic and suitably thin to improve the feel of the skin on the sole of the foot, the movement and posture of the foot and the body's own shock absorption. However, the sole of the shoe should not be too thin if the soles of the feet have reduced cushioning or if there are obvious skin changes on the soles. The heel cup should be sturdy to support the heel and reduce the risk of sprains. The heel should be low and wide to ensure a wide and stable base. The maximum height of the heel in a good shoe is 2 cm and it is preferable to use a flat, thick sole. A good footwear has a removable insole that allows you to ventilate the insole or insert your own supportive insoles into the footwear. A podiatrist can identify the criteria for a good shoe for everyone. In addition to a podiatrist, you can also get help with footwear from physiotherapists and specialist shoe retailers.

Criteria for good sock

- **Protective and moisture wicking, warming or cooling**
- **Suitable length and width**
- **Fitting, foot-shaped**
- **Untightened rib**
- **Of artificial fibres or of a mixture of materials**

Socks

Footwear selection is also an important part of foot health and foot care. The role of a sock is to protect, warm, cool and wick moisture away from the skin's surface. The right size of sock is very important. A sock that is too small can cause misalignment of the toes, for example by bending the toes or pressing them together. A sock that is too small can also cause ingrown nails. A sock that is too big, on the other hand, can get stuck under the sole of the foot, causing skin changes. The rib should be firm and flexible, but not tightened. The sock should therefore fit well and follow the shape of the foot. A good sock is made of synthetic or blended fibres to keep your feet dry and warm, or cool in summer. Wool and cotton, which collect moisture, should be avoided. For example, Suva Silver-Diabetes socks and Best4Feet silver socks are not only antibacterial thanks to their silver thread, but also heat-regulating, circulatory stimulating, soft and with untightened liner.

There are plenty of support socks for the lower limbs on the market. However, it is advisable to discuss the purchase of support stockings independently with a doctor or other specialist. Podiatrists and various shops also provide advice on how to buy support socks.

Physical activity for functional capacity

Functional limitations often start with a loss of mobility and muscle strength. Regular and varied physical activity plays an important role throughout life. Particularly with ageing, physical activity plays an important role in the prevention and treatment of various diseases and, in particular, in maintaining and improving functional capacity. Exercise can even prevent falls and related injuries. It is therefore important to regularly train both muscle strength and endurance, without forgetting to maintain balance and flexibility.

Well-functioning muscles ensure better balance and posture and increase safe movement. Weak muscle strength, in turn, increases the risk of falls. In addition, weak muscles do not support enough alignment of the lower limbs and movement becomes unstable. Muscle improvement occurs throughout life, and it is never too late to start strengthening your muscles. Strengthening the thigh and buttock muscles in particular is essential for maintaining functional capacity. Good back and abdominal muscle fitness, on the other hand, maintains and supports the body's posture when standing and sitting.

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excellent ways to increase muscle strength. Muscle strength can also be trained effectively, even with a quarter of an hour of home gymnastics. Chair lifts and squats are also good exercises to increase muscle strength. Stair climbing is an effective form of exercise, and effectively increases muscle strength in the lower limbs. You can develop balance by dancing or moving around in nature on uneven surfaces, for example. Flexibility is achieved through regular stretching and yoga, for example. Good endurance fitness is maintained through brisk or strenuous regular exercise. In brisk exercise, you breathe lightly and are able to speak in complete sentences at the same time. In strenuous exercise, breathing becomes more intense and speaking is no longer possible at the same time. A good form of brisk exercise is walking, pole walking or cycling, for example. As strenuous sports, skiing and water running are recommended.

Endurance fitness is maintained by heavier domestic and gardening work, berry picking and hunting, and just basic walking. To make the walk more powerful, you can turn it into a pole walk, which also gets the upper body moving. Examples of sports that specifically improve endurance fitness include skiing, swimming and cycling.

To prevent long-term illnesses, a total of 2.5 hours of vigorous exercise per week or a total of just over an hour of strenuous exercise per week is needed. Endurance exercise can therefore be divided into shorter sessions, for example 20 minutes, as long as the weekly amount of exercise is sufficient. It is therefore advisable to spread physical activity over several days a week, and even a little physical activity is good for fitness and health. Regular muscle strength, balance and flexibility training 2-3 times a week will ensure that you are able to function properly. Healthy exercise tips are compiled from the UKK Institute's weekly health exercise pie for people aged 65 and over.

Exercise for the lower limb muscles

Muscle strength training is a form of exercise in which a load is applied to a muscle. The muscle can be loaded either with extra weights or with muscle-loading exercise, such as aquatic exercise or climbing stairs. In resistance-type exercise, the muscle is subjected to a light load, but the movement is repeated more often than in strength training. In strength training, there are fewer repetitions of the movement. Strength training with heavy loads supports daily activities such as climbing stairs and using a stool. It is particularly important to target the muscles of the thigh and buttock area. Moving fast and reacting quickly is practiced with small weights and quick repetitions.

Muscle training should start with warmed-up muscles. A good muscle warm-up prevents, among other things, strain injuries and varicose veins. Immediately after the exercise, it is a good idea to do some light stretching on the muscle groups to be exercised. After a few hours of exercise, stretching should be more comprehensive and of longer duration to avoid excessive muscle tightness and soreness.

Squatting exercise

By strengthening the buttock and thigh muscles, knee alignment is supported, and walking becomes more confident. The squat exercise strengthens the muscles of the buttocks and thighs. At first, you can take light support from, for example, the back of a chair when doing the exercise. In a squat, bend the knees and hips, bringing the hips back and the knees slightly forward. Bend your knees to about 90 degrees or as much as you can. When standing up from a squat, you must try to prevent the knees from coming closer together. Repeat the movement 10-15 times.

Exercise with a chair

Sitting on and getting off a chair also exercises the muscles of the buttocks and thighs and may be easier to do initially than squatting. You sit on the chair with your hips forward without the support of the armrests. You rise from the

chair using the muscles of the lower limbs and try not to take support from the armrests. You can start strengthening the muscles of the buttocks and thighs with a chair exercise and later move on to a more difficult squat.

Pelvic lift with the back on the floor

The pelvic lift exercises the muscles of the midsection. The pelvic lift involves lifting the torso off the ground by tensing the buttock, thigh, and abdominal muscles. Try to keep the torso straight and maintain tension for a few seconds, then slowly lower the hips. Repeat the movement 10-15 times. The movement can be performed in two different ways; either lying on your back or sitting down. You can start with whichever option seems easier at first and move on to the more difficult one later.

Strengthening the muscles of the calves

Strengthening the muscles of the calves provides more effort and support for walking.

Sitting on and getting off a chair exercises the muscles of the buttocks and thighs

Pelvic lift with the back on the floor

The pelvic lift can also be performed by sitting on the floor

The soles of the feet are strengthened by standing on the toes. Support can be taken gently from the back of the chair. Stand on your toes for a few seconds, then slowly lower yourself back to your heels. Repeat the movement 15-30 times.

Balance

Practising balance and agility is an effective way to prevent falls and encourage more physical activity. Good balance plays an important role in maintaining and improving functional capacity and in coping with everyday life as independently as possible. You can develop balance by dancing or moving around in nature on uneven surfaces, for example.

At home, balance can be practised by standing on one leg. Stand on one leg for about 30 seconds, then switch legs. When performing the exercise, support can be provided by one hand gently holding the back of the chair or the wall.

Help from a podiatrist for foot care and foot health

A podiatrist, a healthcare professional registered with the Valvira, is an expert in promoting foot health and in the comprehensive examination, treatment, and rehabilitation of the lower limbs. A podiatrist is a Bachelor of Health Care (UAS) with 3,5 yesrs degree pro-

Getting up on your toes. Support can be taken gently from the back of the chair.

gramme studies in podiatry in a University of Applies Sciences. Podiatrists work in both the private and public sector and in both primary and specialist care. Foot therapy is always based on an individual treatment plan and aims to treat increasing foot problems and promote foot health. The podiatrist treats skin and nail changes on the feet, instructs on self-care, prepares various lower limb aids, makes exercise programmes, and helps with rehabilitation. An important part of a podiatrist's work is the treatment and prevention of poor posture, postural deformities, and pain in the lower limbs.

Balance can be practised by standing on one leg. Stand on one leg for about 30 seconds, then switch legs. Support can be provided by one hand gently holding the back of the chair or the wall.

Useful links

The website of the Finnish Chiropodists and Podiatrists Association (**SJJL**) contains a list of podiatrists. (***www.sjjl.fi***)

Links to shoe shops:
www.kenka-rale.fi
www.respecta.fi
www.soleusproteor.fi

Online health shop: ***www.edis.fi***

Information on health and physical activity:
www.ukkinstituutti.fi

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Suomen Amyloidoosiyhdistys ry

TUETTU VEIKKAUKSEN TUOTOILLA

The Finnish Amyloidosis Association