



PODIATRY

Footscope

A foot health message from
Proactive Podiatry

Foot Care

SEEKING SAFE PEDICURES

In the image-conscious society we live in, sandal season also means pedicure season as we rush in droves to the nearest nail salon to get our feet scrubbed, brushed and shined to perfection. What many of us don't realise is that a regular pedi also means regular exposure to infections and injuries that we'd really rather not think about. Podiatrists frequently see patients in the summer months claiming that a discoloured nail or a skin infection presented itself after a visit to a nail salon.

Problems occur when pedicurists trim the nails or the cuticle too close to the skin, removing the protection of those elements and leaving the skin open to infection. The jets of a foot spa are often filled with bacteria that are pumped into the fresh water you slip your feet into, allowing someone else's verruca to become your problem. Your freshly shaved summer legs provide big, open pores to give microorganisms easy access below the surface of your skin. Add to these common issues, complications that arise from non-sterilised tools and equipment make a pedicure sound less like a luxurious treatment and more like an invitation for foot infection by the second.

What to look for to know your local salon is safe:

- Check that tools have been properly sterilised using an autoclave, the only way to be sure that bacteria, infection or any spores are properly killed.
- Pedicurists should ask if you have a condition that means your feet have decreased sensitivity, such as diabetes or peripheral neuropathy.
- Equipment such as foot spas should be thoroughly cleaned out in between patrons, and the jets should be flushed with bleach to kill any remaining bacteria.
- The pedicurist should neither cut at your cuticle nor scoop out the protective layer of skin underneath your toenails. These practices can lead to infection. Moisturiser should be applied to soften cuticle and nails should be cleaned with a nail brush.
- Ask the pedicurist if they stock nail varnish for sensitive skin. A lot of nail varnish brands are now reducing the levels of chemicals in their products for people who suffer from side effects such as contact dermatitis around the nails or eyes (we touch our eyes more than 200 times per day).

How to prepare for a pedicure:

Consider bringing your own instruments to the nail salon to avoid potential infection from unsterilised instruments.

- Avoid shaving or waxing for 24 hours before a pedicure.
- If you have any cuts on your feet or legs try rescheduling the appointment for after the cut has healed. If rescheduling isn't possible, skip the foot spa so as not to expose yourself to easy access by microorganisms in the water.

CRACKED HEELS

The heels of our feet are under extra pressure in the summer months from hot and dry conditions, unsupportive footwear and straps that rub at the back of the feet. Hard skin and calluses can develop quickly in these conditions, and without adequate TLC can rapidly become dry and cracked. Cracked heels are often embarrassing and sometimes painful, and while in most cases they can be treated at home, cracked heels should always be taken seriously due to the health risks associated with infection if the heels start to split and bleed.

Hot weather isn't the only culprit when it comes to cracked heels — loading pressure on the heels that require them to be able to stretch and expand can cause cracks if the skin doesn't have the required elasticity to cope. Standing for long periods of time, being pregnant or overweight can also add pressure to the heels and lead to cracking.

Underlying medical conditions can cause dry, cracked heels and exacerbate the problem. A family history and/or personal history of dry skin conditions, such as dermatitis, psoriasis and eczema can all contribute to cracked heels. Conditions such as lymphoma, kidney disease, thyroid problems, diabetes and downs syndrome all increase the risk of cracked heels. If you are in an at-risk group, giving your feet regular TLC, including the removal of hard skin with a pumice stone, moisturising morning and night, and visiting a podiatrist to keep the problem under control will avoid the dangers of cracked heels becoming split, painful and infected.

Top tips to heal and prevent cracked heels

For most of us, cracked heels are unsightly and a summer embarrassment that only seem to get worse as the warm months continue. Cracked heels can be very serious if left untreated as they can lead to infection, particularly in people with underlying high-risk conditions, such as diabetes. Here are our tips for avoiding and treating cracked heels:

1. **Moisturise:** apply a generous layer of moisturiser to the heels of your feet and any other areas with rough and hardened skin at the beginning and end of each day. The moisturiser will help to prevent cracking during the day and will allow your heels to recover overnight.
2. Wear shoes when walking around, especially when walking on hot surfaces that can quickly sap your feet of moisture and cause cracking.
3. Avoid soaking your feet as this will make them more sensitive to injury. Use an emery board or a pumice stone after a shower to remove hard skin from around the heel area.
4. If serious cracks develop, apply moisturiser and cover the area with sports tape to hold the moisture in and prevent the crack from getting worse. **Do not attempt self-treatment if you have diabetes, peripheral neuropathy, peripheral vascular disease and/or end-stage kidney disease – apply a dressing and see your podiatrist or GP, as the area can quickly deteriorate into an ulceration**
5. If the skin splits and bleeds be sure to apply an antiseptic to prevent infection and treat the split as per any other wound, keeping it protected until it heals.
6. Seek professional help from a podiatrist if cracked heels continue to be a problem, a podiatrist can treat cracked heels quickly and effectively to get them smooth and soft for the remainder of the summer.



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