

HE 14-001T  
January 2002  
Teacher Guide

# Stepping Up

## Foot Care in Later Life



### Teacher Guide



**OREGON STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

**EXTENSION SERVICE**

© 2002 Oregon State University. This publication may be photocopied or reprinted in its entirety for noncommercial purposes. Oregon State University Extension Service offers educational programs, activities, and materials—without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, marital status, disability, and disabled veteran or Vietnam-era veteran status—as required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Oregon State University Extension Service is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

**Developed by** Deborah Byrne, Oregon State University, Extension Family and Community Development Faculty, Central Oregon

**Reviewed by** Peggy Pedersen, Oregon State University Health Education Specialist, and Laura Schweger, Doctor of Podiatric Medicine.

*This lesson is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Only your doctor can diagnose and treat a medical problem.*

The Oregon Association for Family and Community Education (FCE) is a nonprofit adult education organization. Members of FCE study groups meet informally on a regular basis to learn new skills and information. Oregon FCE cooperates with OSU Extension Service to produce education programs taught by trained volunteers. If you are interested in forming or joining a study group, contact your county Extension office for more information. Everyone is welcome.

# Stepping Up Foot Care in Later Life Teacher Guide

## Program Materials

### For Teacher

#### HE 14-001T **Stepping Up Foot Care in Later Life — Teacher Guide**

Includes the following handout:

- Name That Foot Problem — Cards

### For Participants

#### HE 14-002 **Stepping Up Foot Care in Later Life — Participant Materials**

Includes the following handouts:

- What's Your Foot Care I.Q.?
- What's Your Foot Care I.Q.? — Answers
- Steps to Prevent Foot Problems
- If the Shoe Fits...Match Game
- If the Shoe Fits...Match Game — Answers
- Walking Foot Care Tips
- Protecting Your Feet
- Foot Care Resources

#### HE 14-003 **Program Evaluation**

### Program Objectives

As a result of this program, participants will be able to:

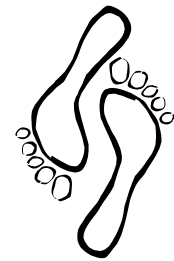
1. Describe normal, age-related changes that contribute to the development of foot problems in older adults.
2. Recognize basic preventive steps to help protect, and possibly improve, the health of older adults' feet.
3. Identify foot care resources.

## Teacher Instructions

**Bold type indicates  
summary statements.**

*Italicized type indicates  
teaching instructions.*

**Prepare in advance:**  
*"Name That Foot Problem"  
cards by cutting them apart.*



## INTRODUCTION

Feet are the body's foundation. Socrates, the Greek philosopher, said, "When your feet hurt, you hurt all over." Foot pain is **not** normal. Yet, many people mistakenly believe that it is normal for their feet to hurt. They ignore foot pain and endure foot problems that in many cases can be successfully treated.

This program highlights common foot conditions that occur as a normal process of aging. Also discussed are steps to help protect feet and possibly improve foot care.

## ASK

- How often do you think of your feet?
- Can you describe a time when your feet hurt?
- What were some of the foot problems you had when wearing ill-fitting shoes?

## Foot Facts – Did You Know?

- According to the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA), most Americans take 8,000 to 10,000 steps a day, which equal several miles.
- **By age 50**, those steps total about 75,000 miles.
- **In a lifetime**, those steps add up to 115,000 miles – more than four times the circumference of the globe.
- **An average day of walking brings a cumulative force equal to several hundred tons to bear on the feet.** For example, a 150-pound person walking 1 mile exerts the equivalent of 127,000 pounds on **each** foot.

## ASK:

Participants to complete the questionnaire **What's Your Foot Care I.Q.?**



**Feet should not hurt.**

**Don't ignore foot pain.**

*Ask participants the questions listed in discussion section.*

*Allow ample time for participants to share.*



**Activity:**

**What's Your Foot Care I.Q.?**



*Have participants find Questionnaire **What's Your Foot Care I.Q.?** in Participant Materials (HE14-002).*

*Read the directions at the top of the page. Ask participants if they understand what to do.*

*Give the participants 3 to 5 minutes to decide which of the statements are true and which are false.*



**What's Your Foot Care I.Q?  
– Answers.**

Review answers.

## Foot Problems and Aging

Maintaining healthy feet is essential for older adults if they are to provide their body with support, balance, and the means to remain safely mobile.

Studies indicate that foot problems are **twice** as common in the older population as in the general population.

Unfortunately, the normal aging process—the cumulative effect of years of neglect and overuse of feet, and/or poorly designed footwear—can produce degenerative changes in the foot. Such changes can potentially undermine an older person's ability to function independently and threaten his or her quality of life.

Such changes could include:

- **Foot ailments that are inherited**—some foot conditions tend to be family traits, such as bunions and hammertoes.
- **Wear and tear on the joints from overuse and abuse of feet**
- **Feet become wider (spread); fat pads flatten and deteriorate** and are less able to cushion the heel and ball of the foot.
- **Arch of the foot** tends to fall.
- **Toenails thicken**, grow more slowly, and become more susceptible to disease.
- **Reduced tactile (touch) sensation**—a person can't tie his shoes if he can't feel his shoelaces, and he won't respond to heat if he doesn't feel it.
- **Changes may occur in vision**—an older person may have difficulty seeing her feet well enough to know what needs to be done.
- **Reduced ability to bend or stoop and flexibility for reaching** can make it difficult for an older person to care for feet and toenails.
- **Chronic diseases** can produce degenerative changes in the foot.
- **As skin ages, it tends to thin and lose its elasticity.** Healing can take longer.
- **Reduced circulation of blood to the feet** from vascular disease can cause hair loss on the leg and foot, thickening of nails, and cold feet.

*Introduce program topic.*

**Foot problems can undermine an older person's ability to function independently, remaining mobile and self-reliant.**

*Describe some of the factors associated with aging that may contribute to foot problems.*

**Some foot ailments are inherited.**



**The cumulative effect of years of neglect or overuse of feet or poorly designed footwear causes wear and tear on the joints.**



- **Decrease in oil-producing glands** can cause the skin of the feet to become vulnerable to drying and cracking.
- **Increase in risk of infection from dry skin and cracking.** Dry skin has less strength than moist skin, which can allow bacteria to grow and enter the body.
- **Increase in weight** can affect the bone and ligaments.
- **Specific foot-health problems, such as nerve and circulatory disorders, may develop in older diabetics.**

## EXPLAIN



### Steps to Prevent Foot Problems

Among older people, many foot problems can be treated successfully and the pain and discomfort of foot ailments relieved. Getting in step for proper foot health and comfort is essential for older adults if they are to avoid and prevent minor foot problems from developing into conditions with serious complications.

### Foot Hygiene

- Inspect feet daily or have someone else do this for you.
- Check for dry skin, cracks between toes, redness, swelling, blisters, and sores.
- Wash feet daily using mild soap and lukewarm water.
- Dry feet thoroughly, especially between toes, to avoid infection.
- Use a moisturizing lotion on your feet. Do **not** put lotion between toes.

### Toenail Care

- To properly trim toenails, follow the suggestions on the **Toenail Care Checklist** (see *Participant Materials*).

### Seek Medical Attention

- **Early medical care can help to ensure long-term foot health and avoid worsening existing foot problems.** Schedule check-ups with your doctor or podiatrist to have your feet examined regularly.



### Steps to Prevent Foot Problems

*Lead group discussion on steps that can be taken to protect the health of feet and prevent foot problems in older adults.*

**Proper foot hygiene is essential for healthy feet.**



**Seek medical attention to protect feet from unnecessary problems.**



## REVIEW



### Main Areas of Foot Evaluation

Your doctor or foot doctor (podiatrist) can evaluate the health of your feet and recommend appropriate treatment and care. He or she will examine:

1. **Vascular status**—is blood flow adequate to the legs, feet, and toes?
2. **Skin and nails condition**—do legs, feet, or nails have rashes, open sores, wounds, abrasions, blisters, skin coloration, infections, or spots of irritation?
3. **Nerve function/supply**—are there areas of numbness or pain in legs or feet?
4. **Musculoskeletal**—are the feet flexible? Is there any deformity or weakness in muscles and bones, e.g., bunions, hammertoes, arthritis, collapsed arches, and heel pain?

## EXPLAIN

### Proper Footwear Can Reduce Foot Problems

Selecting a shoe that fits properly is critical to promoting healthy feet and a sense of well-being.

- **Shoes that don't fit can cause a variety of foot problems** from toe deformities, blisters, and calluses to leg and back pain.
- **Don't select shoes by size alone** but by how comfortable the shoes feel and fit **both** feet.

## REVIEW

### Shoe Construction: What Should You Look For?

Understanding the basics of shoe construction can help you buy well-fitting and constructed shoes for comfort, function, and safety.



### Activity

#### If the Shoe Fits...Match Game

This activity will review the different parts of a shoe.

## Main Areas of Foot Evaluation



**Schedule check-ups with your doctor or podiatrist to have your feet examined regularly.**

**Proper footwear can reduce foot problems.**

*Go over recommendations for choosing footwear for proper fit.*



### Activity

#### If the Shoe Fits...Match Game

*Have participants find Handout **If the Shoe Fits... Match Game** in Participant Materials.*

*Read instructions. Give the participants 3 to 5 minutes to complete activity.*

#### If the Shoe Fits... Match Game – Answers

*Review answers.*

*Discuss results.*

## REVIEW

### Footwear Fit

Properly fitted shoes offer good protection and support from injury and infection. Most people find that their footwear needs vary according to their activities and activity levels.

- **Measure both feet regularly.** The size of your feet can change as you grow older because feet tend to spread with age.
- **Buy shoes to fit your *bigger* foot.** Make sure the shape of your shoes matches the shape of your feet.
- **Shop for shoes later in the day when feet tend to swell to their largest.**
- **Stand when fitting shoes, and check that there is adequate space ( $\frac{3}{8}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch) from the tip of your longest toe to the inside edge of the shoe.**
- **New shoes should feel comfortable when you try them on.** Any new pair of shoes should *not* require a “break-in” period.
- **Your heel should fit comfortably in the shoe** with a minimum amount of slippage. Walk in the shoes before purchasing to make sure they feel right.
- **Try on new footwear with the type of socks or hose you usually wear with that type of shoe.**
- **Don’t stockpile shoes.** The glue dries out over time, and the soles deteriorate.

## REVIEW

### Shoe Selection

The material from which the shoe is made can affect fit and comfort.

- **For maximum comfort, select shoes made of soft, flexible material that will conform to the feet.**
- Shoes made from soft flexible materials that “breathe” and mold to your foot provide the best fit. For example, **leather, cotton canvas, or stretchy man-made fabrics** permit moisture to evaporate and “wick” perspiration away from the foot.

**Footwear needs vary according to the person’s activities and activity levels.**

**Measure *both* feet every time you buy shoes.**



**For maximum comfort, select shoes made of soft, flexible materials that will conform to the feet.**



## Sock Selection

- Wear socks or stockings with your footwear to keep your feet dry and to cushion and protect them from pressure.
- In general, **cotton, wool, or the new high-tech fabrics are far better for your feet** because they provide a “wicking” effect, which absorbs moisture and keeps the feet cool as perspiration rapidly evaporates.
- **Wear socks that are loose but not wrinkled.** Avoid socks, pantyhose, or stockings that constrict circulation. Socks and hose preferably should be free of seams.

## Other Suggestions for Healthy Feet

- **Avoid extreme temperatures to protect your feet.**
- **A nutritionally balanced diet provides needed nutrients and energy for your feet.**
- **Avoid being overweight.** Additional weight makes more work for your feet.
- **Avoid smoking.**
- **Rotate your footwear and change socks daily to keep feet dry.**
- **Consider using elastic (no-tie) shoelaces.** They are an easy-to-fasten alternative to traditional shoelaces.
- **Do not use over-the-counter preparations for foot ailments.** They contain chemicals that destroy skin cells and can burn healthy skin.

## REVIEW

### Walking: Foot Care Tips in Later Life

#### Walking is an excellent conditioner of your feet.

Benefits of walking include:

- Forces the joints of the feet to remain active
- Helps keep weight down
- Improves circulation of blood to the feet
- Improves muscle tone in the legs
- Contributes to a sense of well-being and self-esteem

**Wear socks or stockings with your footwear to keep feet dry and to cushion and protect them from pressure.**



**A nutritionally balanced diet provides needed nutrients and energy for your feet.**



**Avoid smoking. It increases risk of foot problems.**



**Walking is one of the best exercises for your feet.**



**Check with your physician**



**before starting a walking program.** Certain health problems, such as osteoporosis and arthritis, may increase the risk of injury when walking.

## Stretching

Proper stretching before *and* after walking can prevent injuries. Other tips on walking are in the handout ***Walking: Foot Care Tips in Later Life***.

## REVIEW

### Protecting Feet from Common Foot Problems

There are more than 300 foot ailments. To maintain healthy feet, it is helpful to be familiar with some of the most frequent foot problems that occur, especially in older adults.

Understanding basic foot care can help you care for and protect your feet from pain and discomfort.

## EXPLAIN

### Activity: *Name That Foot Problem*

Twelve common foot problems are highlighted in the ***Name That Foot Problem*** cards.

For more information on foot care problems and prevention strategies, refer to the handout ***Foot Care Resources*** in *Participant Materials*.

### **APMA'S 75,000-Mile Check-Up**

---

According to the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA), most Americans by age 50 have logged 75,000 miles on their feet.

To find out the potential effect 75,000 miles have on your feet, take the **APMA's 75,000-Mile Test**.

Details are in ***Foot Care Resources*** under the APMA's listing.

## Name That Foot Problem

### Instructions

1. **Pass out the "Name That Foot Problem" cards** to participant volunteers.
2. According to the number on the card [1–12], have volunteers read out loud both sides of the assigned card.
3. **Ask** volunteers first to read the **description** of the foot problem (on the front of card) and then the **name** of the foot condition (on the back of the card).

Have the participants find the handout ***Foot Care Resources***.

- **Point out** ➔ *American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA) listing.*

## SUMMARY

The older you are, the **greater** your chances of developing foot problems. Healthy feet can add to your overall health as you age. Being familiar with the **warning signs** of potential or existing foot problems can lead to better preventive care and early treatment.

Finally, some of the positive benefits of using preventive foot health care strategies include:

- Increase and maintain comfort and safety
- Maintain mobility
- Limit possibility of additional medical problems
- Reduce chances of hospitalization because of infection
- Reduce possibility of need for institutional care

- Complete the **Program Evaluation**, HE 14-003.
- Resources: A list of foot care resources and references is in *Participant Materials*.

## After Summary



### Review

**Participant Materials** so participants know what handouts are provided.



### Ask

participants to fill out the **Program Evaluation** (HE 14-003).



### Return

evaluations to your local county Extension Service office.