

# HEALTH

## Ounce Of Prevention

### Cold Weather Can Cause Trouble For Toes

(NAPS)—Throughout the year, it's a good idea to go toe-to-toe with health improvement—and a good way to start is to take care of your feet, especially the toes.

The feet and toes are often neglected, but they are vital to any healthy body. Two major toe problems to watch out for are ingrown toenails and fungal nails. Cold weather can increase the occurrence of fungal nails because heavy socks can enhance moisture around the nails. Also, since toes are kept covered up, problems may not be detected as easily.

Ingrown nails, the most common nail impairment, are nails whose corners or sides dig painfully into the soft tissue of nail grooves, often leading to irritation, redness and swelling. Ingrown toenails may be caused by:

- ❖ Improperly trimmed nails (Trim them straight across).
- ❖ Heredity.
- ❖ Shoe pressure; crowding of the toes.
- ❖ Repeated trauma to the feet from normal activities.

Ingrown toenails should be evaluated and treated by a podiatrist, who can diagnose the ailment and then prescribe medication or another appropriate treatment.

Fungal infection of the toenail, or onychomycosis, is often ignored because it can be present without causing pain. The disease is characterized by a progressive change in a toenail's quality and color, which is often ugly and embarrassing. Ways to prevent fungal infection of the toenail include:

- ❖ Proper hygiene and regular inspection of the feet and toes.
- ❖ Washing the feet with soap and water, remembering to dry thoroughly.



**Preventing foot and toe problems may be as simple as choosing shoes and socks that fit comfortably and breathe.**

- ❖ Shower shoes should be worn when possible in public areas.
- ❖ Shoes, socks or hosiery should be changed more than once daily.
- ❖ Wear shoes that fit well and are made of materials that breathe.
- ❖ Avoid wearing excessively tight hosiery, which promotes moisture.
- ❖ Disinfect instruments used to cut toenails.

Treatments of fungal nails may vary, depending on the nature and severity of the infection. A podiatric physician can detect a fungal infection early, culture the nail, determine the cause and form a suitable treatment plan, which may include prescribing topical or oral medication, and debridement (removal of diseased nail matter and debris) of an infected nail.

For more information on foot health, you can visit the American Podiatric Medicine Association's Web site at [www.apma.org](http://www.apma.org) or call 1-800-FOOTCARE to request a free brochure.