



Podiatric Care for Nursing Home Residents

What is a podiatrist?

A podiatrist is a health care worker who specialises in the medical management of the lower limb and foot. The training to become a podiatrist in Ireland includes an extensive level 8 bachelor degree in Podiatric Medicine, delivered by the School of Medicine and Health Sciences in the University of Galway. Modules in anatomy, physiology, biomechanics, pathology, and therapeutic techniques are taught over a four year period, with weekly placement periods in hospitals and private podiatry settings. The main difference between podiatrists and chiropodists/foot health practitioners is their scope of practice. Podiatrists manage the lower limb as a whole - routine nail and skin care, musculoskeletal health, footwear prescription, orthoses (insoles) prescription, nail surgery with local anaesthesia, exercise prescription, gait analysis, management of the diabetic foot and the management of complex wounds. Chiropodists and foot health practitioners are trained to provide low risk routine nail and skin care.

Who needs a podiatrist?

Everyone! Most people require treatment from a podiatrist at some stage in their life. Podiatric issues are particularly apparent in the older person, where self care becomes more challenging and when systemic diseases like arthritis or diabetes manifest in the feet, causing pain and discomfort. Whilst younger generations can safely receive routine foot care from a chiropodist or foot health practitioner, a podiatrist is better equipped to manage the feet of older people, where complex co-morbidities and immobility presents.

Podiatric Care in a Nursing Home Setting

In a nursing home setting, residents face increased risks related to their foot health due to limited mobility, poor circulation, or underlying conditions such as diabetes. Issues like foot ulcers, infections, and painful deformities can worsen without appropriate care. Podiatrists play a crucial role in assessing, preventing, and managing these risks, ensuring regular monitoring and offering preventive care to avoid serious complications.

Podiatry for Those Confined to Bed

For residents who are confined to bed, podiatric care is vital to prevent complications such as pressure sores, contractures, and circulation problems. A podiatrist will regularly inspect the feet, manage any existing issues like calluses or ulcers, and can provide exercises to maintain circulation and prevent further immobility-related problems. Elongated toenails catching on bed clothes may seem insignificant, but it can drastically reduce a person's quality of life. Sometimes a simple nail trim can make a world of difference, providing a patient with comfort and relief.

What Happens in a Podiatry Appointment?

During a podiatry appointment, the podiatrist will assess the health of the resident's feet, including checking for signs of infection, skin conditions, deformities, and circulation problems. They usually perform routine nail trimming and skin care, as this is often a challenge and source of discomfort for nursing home residents. Where appropriate, advice on foot care or shoe fitting is given. The podiatrist will also address any specific concerns of the patient, and discuss appropriate patient-specific lower limb management with nursing home staff when necessary.

How Often Do I Need to See My Podiatrist?

This of course varies from patient to patient, however for those in nursing homes a routine podiatric appointment is generally indicated every 6-8 weeks. Remember that prevention is always better than cure.

Can I Check My Podiatrist is Registered?

Yes, it is important to ensure your podiatrist is properly registered. All podiatrists who have a degree in podiatric medicine and who meet the clinical standards in the Republic of Ireland are listed on the CORU website, which is accessible to view by the public.

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