

>> Avoid stepping into puddles if you have cracks or open wounds on your feet



FRETTING ABOUT FEET

When we are at greater risk for diseases such as malaria and swine flu, it's very easy to overlook those that don't start with a fever or sneeze. But, foot care shouldn't be ignored in the monsoon because it can lead to infections, says **Pearl Mathias**

There's no doubt that you should take necessary precautions during the monsoons, especially when your feet are concerned. The humidity during the rainy months brings with it a surge in fungal infections. So, before you leap joyfully into a puddle, let us tell you why you should stop yourself — puddles and water-logged areas may be teeming with harmful bacteria. Your monsoon footwear may provide protection from the rain or they may dry out easily after getting wet, but they don't protect your feet adequately. There's more to keeping your feet clean and healthy during this season than picking the right kind of shoes. We spoke to a few experts in the city for tips on how to keep your feet protected this monsoon.

FOOT MALADIES

Just because we have thicker skin on our feet, it doesn't mean that they are immune to infection. In fact, our feet are susceptible to many types of bacterial and fungal infections because they can be damp for long hours during the day. Pradnya Girdhar, senior physiotherapist at Saifee Hospital, Dr. Rameshwar Gutte, dermatologist at Dr. L H Hiranandani Hospital, Dr. Geeta Fazalbhoy, dermatologist, managing director and founder member at Skin & You Clinic, and Dr. Pradeep Monoot, orthopedic surgeon

FOOT CARE FOR THE SEASON

We like our feet to be clean and smooth, but walking through water-logged streets and skipping over puddles barely gives our feet a chance. Here are a few dos and don'ts shared by the experts that you should remember during these rainy months.

DOs

- Moisturise your feet, especially around the heel area, but make sure you keep the regions between your toes dry.
- Regularly clip your toe nails to reduce the risk of infection. Long nails gather mud and dirt, which can lead to infections.
- Wash your feet with liquid soap twice a day and use antifungal powder between your toes.
- Wear open shoes as closed ones may lead to your feet staying wet for longer hours, increasing the



chances of a medical condition known as Trench Foot occurring.

- Make sure that you clean your footwear every day and air it out well to avoid moisture from settling in, and to hamper the growth of bacteria.

DON'Ts

- Avoid venturing out in the rains if you have fresh wounds or cracks on your legs and feet, as this can cause dirt and bacteria to seep in, which can lead to infection.
- Avoid spa treatments because during the monsoon it becomes difficult to maintain hygiene levels, even in the best spas. If you opt to go for a pedicure, ensure that the instruments used are sterilised and cleaned with disinfectants, or carry your own set.
- Do not share your shoes or foot towels with anyone.
- Avoid walking barefoot in public places.
- Don't ignore cracks on your feet and don't scrub your feet excessively.

and specialist in knee, foot and ankle surgery at S. L. Raheja Hospital – A Fortis Associate Hospital, tell us about a few of them.

Leptospirosis

This is a bacterial infection that is contracted when a wound is exposed to contaminated water, making it common during the monsoons. The chances of infection are high if you have cuts or open wounds on your feet. Children playing in contaminated water and people who regularly wade through water logged areas should be careful.

Pyoderma

This is a bacterial infection that can lead to pus and swelling.

Pitted keratolysis

This is a bacterial infection that occurs among people who sweat a lot, and those who wear tight and restricted footwear.

Athlete's foot

This is the most common infection seen during the monsoon. It causes the skin to turn white or greenish, which is accompanied by a foul-smelling pus.

Fungal infections

These are caused when the skin is wet for long periods of time. This may lead to ringworm or itching of the skin due to prolonged contact with dampened clothes.

Although not an infection, toenails can get brittle and become discoloured due to soaked shoes during this season.

BEST FOOT FORWARD

Our attention is often drawn to more pressing matters such as a bout of acne or monsoon-related hair loss, and we often neglect foot care. However, caring for our feet is as important as it is for the rest of our body. Although, on the flip side, you don't need to turn to over-the-counter medication as a first resort; there are simple home remedies you can use.

Foot scrubbing

Soak your feet in warm water for 10 minutes. You can add antifungal solutions or even lime wedges in the water. Follow this up by scrubbing your feet well.

Foot moisturiser

Apply any moisturiser on your feet. This will help new cells form, replacing old dead cells.

Antiseptic gels

Applying antiseptic gels to your feet before you go to bed will help clear up the fungus and bacteria that may gather in the nooks and crevices of your feet.

Pedicure and foot masks

These help maintain healthy skin on your feet, and free them of bacteria and fungus. *Multani mitti* masks or orange peel masks are simple to make at home and can be very helpful in keeping your feet healthy through the monsoon.

Herbal and Ayurvedic packs

These keep your feet clean and help you avoid infections. Apply a fresh paste made of turmeric, neem and sesame seeds on your feet, and in between the toes, to beat the monsoon dampness and odours.

Apart from these remedies, drink a lot of water during the monsoons to stay well hydrated. A glass of warm water mixed with a teaspoon of honey will help flush out toxins and give you a better chance at fighting infection. Dr. Rameshwar tells us that it is best to avoid over-the-counter creams containing steroidal medicines as they could increase the risk of infection. It's important to see a doctor if there is redness, pain, swelling, discharge or severe itching.