

Nail and Foot Care

● SKILL SNAPSHOT

Purpose

- Maintains hygiene and skin integrity while identifying pressure, perfusion, neuropathy, infection, and injury early.

When to use

- Routine hygiene and assessment, with modified care for diabetes, neuropathy, vascular disease, anticoagulation, or impaired self-care.

Supplies needed

- Basin/washcloth; mild soap; towels; moisturizer; nail file/clippers only if permitted; clean socks; gloves; mirror for teaching.

● PREP + PATIENT SETUP

- Assess diabetes, PAD, neuropathy, anticoagulation, infection, wounds, edema, pain, and facility scope/policy.
- Inspect pulses, color, temperature, cap refill, sensation, skin, nails, and between toes.

● VAULT TIP

- Foot care is an assessment skill first. In high-risk feet, knowing when not to trim is the safest intervention.

● STEP-BY-STEP

1. Hand hygiene; identify patient; explain care and provide privacy.
2. Apply gloves when skin is open, drainage is present, or policy requires.
3. Test water temperature with thermometer or unaffected skin; neuropathy may prevent the patient from detecting burns.
4. Wash feet gently with mild soap and warm—not hot—water. Avoid prolonged soaking, especially with diabetes/PAD.
5. Clean carefully between toes and around nails without digging under the nail plate.
6. Rinse and dry thoroughly, especially between toes.
7. Inspect heels, soles, sides, between toes, and nail folds for redness, cracks, blisters, callus, fungal change, drainage, or injury.
8. Apply moisturizer to tops and bottoms of feet, but not between toes.
9. If low risk and policy permits, trim nails straight across after softening; do not cut corners deeply. Smooth sharp edges with a file.
10. Do not cut corns/calluses or use chemical removers. Do not trim thick, ingrown, infected, or high-risk nails.
11. Apply clean, well-fitting socks and shoes; check inside footwear for foreign objects and rough seams.
12. Teach daily inspection, no barefoot walking, safe footwear, and prompt reporting of wounds, color/temperature change, swelling, or pain.

● SAFETY REMINDERS

- Diabetes, neuropathy, PAD, anticoagulation, or poor healing may require podiatry care.
- No hot water, heating pads, sharp callus tools, or chemical removers.
- Do not apply lotion between toes.
- Report ischemic or infected findings promptly.

● COMMON MISTAKES

- Soaking too long.
- Rounding nail corners deeply.
- Cutting high-risk nails/calluses.
- Missing the spaces between toes.

● DOCUMENTATION

- Skin/nail/neurovascular findings.
- Care performed and products used.
- Wounds, drainage, pain, edema.
- Teaching and footwear assessment.
- Referral/provider notification.