

WALK THIS WAY

## Nail Salon Smarts

Do you know how stringent your favourite pedi place is about disinfection and sterilization? It's worth finding out. The safest shops pull out a set of prepackaged one-use instruments for each client or encourage you to bring your own (porous tools such as pumice stones, nail files and buffers can't be sterilized).

If your city inspects nail salons, ask to see the report, which will list the local recommended hygiene practices and note any infractions, says Rachel Dunbar, public health inspector for the Middlesex-London Health Unit in London, Ont. Depending on what you find out, you may decide to switch salons or opt to do your own toes at home.

**TIP: Don't shave or wax your legs for at least 24 hours beforehand to reduce the risk of infection.** "You also want to make sure the operator washes her hands before starting," says Dunbar.

When it comes to applying nail polish, rethink that gel pedicure. Sure, it may last longer, but too long—more than two weeks—may make your nails brittle and vulnerable to infection, says Dr. John-Paul Gordon, St. John's, N.L., podiatrist. He suggests waiting a few days between applications, if you can. Nails don't need to breathe, he says, but "a nail that's not constantly covered in polish will be healthier."

# BEST FOOT forward

You've been waiting for months to stroll barefoot in the sand—so follow these tips to keep your feet healthy all season long.

BY WENDY HAAF



## INFECTION PROTECTION

Summer is prime time for foot infections such as athlete's foot (itchy, sore, peeling feet), cellulitis (red, tender, rash-like areas on the skin) and plantar warts (hard, thick growths on the soles of the feet). Infections like these are caused by fungi, bacteria and viruses that thrive in the warm, moist environments where we tend to wander barefoot—think pool decks, public showers and change rooms. Prevention is as easy as slipping your feet into flip-flops. Just don't walk around or stand all day in them; wearing these flimsy summer staples for too long can cause foot and ankle pain, and they won't protect your tootsies from stubbed toes or cuts, says Dr. John-Paul Gordon, podiatrist in St. John's, N.L.

## KEEP THEM DRY

Infections can also occur closer to home—damp footwear and sweaty socks are havens for bacteria. "Our feet naturally sweat up to a cup of moisture per day,"

says Marjorie Neill, registered nurse at one of the Dalhousie Family Medicine clinics in Halifax. Fight back by changing your socks regularly and drying your feet thoroughly. Take the insoles out of your shoes overnight to refresh them and consider wearing a few different pairs of shoes, alternating from day to day throughout the week. And because dry, callused skin can split and crack, providing an entry point for infection, Neill recommends using a pumice stone to smooth your feet immediately after bathing, then moisturizing.

## TREAT YOUR FEET

If you suspect you're battling an infection, you might be tempted to try an over-the-counter treatment, but it's wise to see a health professional first for an accurate diagnosis, says Neill. And always take care to follow the instructions; wart remedies can burn surrounding skin, and antifungal creams need to be used consistently as per product instructions—not just till the itching stops. Plus, some treatments may not be appropriate for people with diabetes; if that's you, talk to your doctor beforehand.

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