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happy feet

by Stephanie Holland

Healthy feet are the foundation of a strong Yoga practice. Keep them nourished, nurtured and happy with essential oils.

Yoga poses require proper alignment of the feet for strong energetic grounding, balancing and agility. No surprises there! What may be less obvious is that good alignment is heavily reliant on excellent foot health, both structurally and cosmetically. By including your feet in your daily cleansing routine and using essential oils to keep them looking, feeling and smelling great, you can reconnect with happy, healthy feet. Not only that, you can prevent and treat a number of common conditions from calluses and cracked heels to athlete's foot and verrucae. Your feet are important for Yoga and in life in general. It's time to pay them the respect they deserve.

"Nobody actually considers how amazing your feet are. That's the very first thing I do in my teacher training. The very first day, I say: "OK guys, look at your feet!". A lot of people pay attention to their hands but ignore their feet," says Anne-Marie Newland, Sun Power Yoga. Amanda Page, holistic podiatrist at Holistic Health and Footcare, agrees: "People forget about their poor feet. They tend to hide them away here in the UK and come and see us when a problem has already started. If you've got pain in your feet, it can really impact on your life."

With the importance of our feet either forgotten or unknown, it's no wonder that we, in the UK, don't have such a good relationship with

them. We ignore problems until the pain drives us to the GP, we keep them scrunched up in shoes for hours on end and, often, we don't even look at them! "What people tend to do is come out of the shower and don't even touch their feet. They just let their feet dry off and put their socks and shoes on," says Amanda. You can re-connect with your feet by including them in your daily cleansing ritual. "Focus on how important your feet are. Looking good and smelling good are the first things that we can all do. Absolute simple foot regime, I call it!" says Anne-Marie.

daily foot care

By following a simple routine on a daily basis, you can keep your feet happy and healthy, prevent common conditions from occurring and nip them quickly in the bud when they do:

Look at your feet. Are they dry or flaky? Are there any lesions or wounds? Are your nails trimmed? Do they smell good? Re-build a relationship with your feet.

Wash your feet every day. Dry them thoroughly, especially between the toes. Moisturise them if they are dry. Give them a massage before wearing socks and shoes.

Keep your nails trimmed, but not too short. "I would say you should be able to get your fingernail under the sides of the nail and the end of the nail," says Amanda.

Indulge in a weekly footbath. Add 6 drops of essential oils and 1 cup of salt to a footbath and soak for 15-20 mins to relax and re-invigorate hard working feet. Try essential oils of peppermint, tea tree, geranium, rosemary, lavender, eucalyptus or lemongrass.

Exercise your feet. Keep the 33 muscles, 31 joints and 100 ligaments on each foot flexible and strong.

"Putting a tennis ball under your foot and rolling it, and picking marbles up with your toes is a good way to strengthen your foot muscles. It helps to keep your feet supple and also to improve the circulation. Even a tin of baked beans can help to roll under the muscle of your foot!" says Amanda. Katy Appleton of appleYoga, agrees: "I carry a golf ball with me everywhere I go to help massage the soles of the feet and to encourage the feeling of spreading of the

foot, and also a feeling of grounding."

Lack of love, patience and attention can lead to serious foot problems such as fungal infections and cracked heels. "They won't affect practice directly, it's just you need to worry about general hygiene and whether people are going to catch these things as some are highly contagious," says Lara Baumann, teacher of the Quantum method of Yoga.

prevention and treatment for common foot conditions

Some conditions such as verrucae and in-grown toenails can cause considerable pain. "If someone has an in-grown toenail, that's going to be painful for them and of course maybe their alignment will be off as their weight bearing will try to avoid pain," says Katy. Calluses can also be indicative of structural problems such as collapsed arches which can benefit from adjustment. "Collapsed arches are very common", says Lara. The muscles of the legs need to be worked and attention paid to the root lock, mula bandha". Understanding how the health of your feet impacts your practice is vitally important.

Natural remedies are becoming more and more popular in the UK, especially the use of essential oils. They have a number of properties that make them effective when it comes to treating and preventing several common foot conditions. Many oils naturally are antimicrobial, antiviral, antibacterial and antifungal which may also enable them to act as immunostimulants. Whether you suffer from sweaty feet, athlete's foot, cracked heels, in-grown toenails, calluses or verrucae, there's an effective DIY aromatherapy treatment for you.

sweaty feet

Each foot has 250,000 sweat glands that produce half a pint of moisture every day. Sometimes hereditary, excess production can also be triggered by certain foods and medications that encourage the body to produce more sweat.

Treatment is crucial. Fungal infections love warm, moist places.

"Wear socks made of 60% wool and 40% man-made fibres and make sure they're not too tight," Amanda says. Wear well-ventilated footwear, washable insoles, and slippers that let your feet breathe when indoors.

essential oils:

Cypress – Cupressus sempervirens

Sage – Salvia officinalis

DIY Aromatherapy: Foot powder and footbaths

Foot powder: Add 2 drops of essential oils and 1 tbsp of baking powder to a plastic bag and shake well to mix. Allow to dry in the bag, using a rolling pin to separate. Dust on to the feet morning and evening. Add 1 tbsp of the powder to your shoes over night. Remove the powder from shoes before wearing!

Foot bath: Add 6 drops of essential oils to half a cup of salt, add to a footbath and soak for 15-20 mins daily or as needed.

athlete's foot

Athlete's foot is a common fungal infection that results in fissuring and scaling between the toes. Symptoms include itchiness and odour.

To prevent athlete's foot, keep feet as clean and dry as possible, taking care to dry between each toe. Wear light absorbent cotton socks to promote circulation and reduce sweating. Go barefoot whenever possible; heat and moisture in shoes is heaven for fungal infections. Don't share your Yoga mat and keep your feet covered during class. You can buy non-slip socks so you don't lose your grip during practice.

essential oils for athlete's foot:

Tea tree – Melaleuca alternifolia

Lavender – Lavandula angustifolia

Cypress – Cupressus sempervirens

DIY aromatherapy treatment: Foot baths and neat application

Foot bath: Add 6 drops of essential oils to 1 cup of salt, add to a footbath and soak for 15-20 mins daily or as needed.

Neat application: Apply sparingly to the affected area 2-3 times a day, allowing it to dry thoroughly.

Continue the treatment for 2 weeks after the visible symptoms disappear, advises Amanda. Treating your shoes is recommended. They can also carry the fungus.



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cracked heels

Cracked heels are very common, more so in the summer when everyone wears flip-flops and sling-backs. "With no heel support, the fat on the heel splays out so it can cause the skin to crack," says Amanda. Anne-Marie adds: "Now apart from anything else, this allows bacteria to breed in those cracks and then you can have serious infection."

To prevent cracked heels, moisturise your feet twice a day if you're prone to dry skin. Drink plenty of water, increasing your intake during the summer months when it's easier to become dehydrated. "If your diet is really poor, that can affect your heels and your feet," says Amanda, so a visit to the nutritionist may be advisable.

essential oils:

Tea tree – *Melaleuca alternifolia*
Lavender – *Lavandula angustifolia*

They have to be careful how they cut their nails. A lot of people tend to cut a 'v' in the edge of the nail and that's bad news because the skin will just grow over it and the spike will just go straight into the skin," says Amanda

To prevent in-grown toenails, adhere to a good nail cutting technique. "Cut them straight along the edge, but don't cut round the edges," says Amanda.

Essential oils for in-grown toenails:

Tea tree – *Melaleuca alternifolia*
Tagetes – *Tagetes minuta*
Lavender – *Lavandula angustifolia*
Eucalyptus – *Eucalyptus globulus*
Niaouli – *Melaleuca viridiflora*
Pine – *Pinus sylvestris*
Lemon – *Citrus Limonum*

DIY Treatment: Massage blend and foot baths



Carrier oil:

Avocado *Persea gratissima*

DIY Treatment: Foot creams and foot baths

Foot creams permeate the cracks and introduce moisture efficiently: Add 5 drops of essential oils to 10 ml of base cream and apply to the heels twice a day.

Foot bath: Add 6 drops of essential oils to 1 tsp of avocado oil, add to footbath and soak for 15-20 mins daily or as needed.

"If they're in a really bad state, it's better to see a podiatrist because we can get rid of the layer of dead skin which allows the moisture to get back in there," says Amanda.

in-grown toenails

In-grown toenails can become painful, red and inflamed. There may also be odour and even pus. "Some people are more prone because they have involuted nails, which means the nail curves at the edge.

Massage blend: Dilute 5 drops of tea tree and 5 drops of tagetes in 10ml of apricot oil and massage into the nail bed 2-3 times a day.

Foot bath: Add 6 drops of essential oils to half a cup of salt, add to a footbath and soak for 15-20 mins daily or as needed.

"If it's inflamed and sore, don't attempt what we call bathroom surgery, by poking around. That's the worst thing you could possibly do. See your GP or a podiatrist and, using a local anaesthetic, we can cut the nail spike out," advises Amanda.

calluses

Calluses are a protection mechanism. When you put a lot of pressure on a certain area, the skin over-produces in that area and you get a build up of hard skin. "It's a good indicator of how you're walking," says Anne Marie. Some people naturally roll on one side more than the other, or put more pressure on the back heel. This can impact on your postural alignment. "You can re-train the feet and when you do,

you correct knee and hip problems as well. You can't balance without structurally good feet," adds Anne-Marie.

Footwear can also cause calluses. "You can get a lot of hard skin on the ball of your foot if you're constantly wearing high heels," says Amanda. This poses a 2-fold problem because it shortens the tendons in the back of the calf. "I've had clients who cannot put their heels on the floor. They walk around in tip toes and they cannot put their heels down," says Anne-Marie. To prevent calluses, wear comfortable and appropriate footwear.

Carrier oil for calluses:

Calendula – *Calendula officinalis*

DIY Treatment: Foot baths

Foot bath: Add 1 tsp of calendula oil to half a cup of salt, add to a footbath and soak feet for 15-20 mins. When dry, file down the hard skin. Massage with calendula oil and repeat as often as needed.

Verrucae

Verrucae are warts that grow inwards on the soles of your feet. They are painful and highly contagious.

"Sometimes you can have a verruca for 2 years and then it just goes. Your body creates an immune response and that really is the best way to get rid of them, but sometimes they can be on pressure points," says Amanda. **Lara adds:** "In Yoga practice we have many pressure points in the feet that we work with, so if you've got troubles with your feet, you're not benefiting from the same pressure points that healthy feet would benefit from."

Essential oils for verrucae:

Tea tree – *Melaleuca alternifolia*
Lemon – *Citrus limonum*
Thyme – *Thymus vulgaris*

DIY Aromatherapy: Neat application

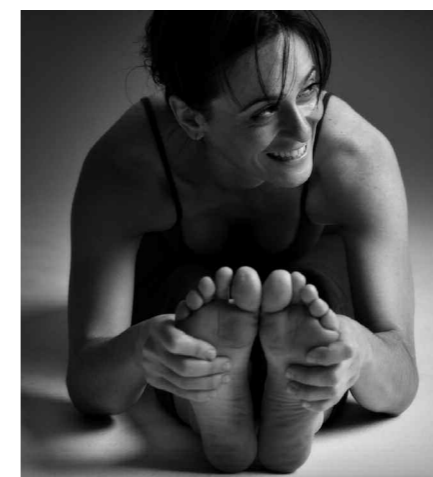
Neat application: Blend lemon and tea tree in equal parts. Apply neat, 2-3 times a day, using a cotton bud.

Stubborn cases: Add 3 drops of thyme to the blend. Apply as before.

re-connecting with your feet

Proper foot care is essential to the overall health of your body. Many signs of disease appear in the feet first so they are a good reflection of your general health. Including them as part of your daily cleansing ritual and using essential oils to treat common conditions early will keep them happy and healthy. Love your feet and they'll keep you grounded, balanced and agile enough to maximise the benefits of any pose. Unleash those happy feet!

Stephanie Holland is an IFPA certified aromatherapist, For further details, visit: www.aromamuse.com.



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