

Growing Older Is Enhanced By Staying On Your Feet If Possible

There are an estimated 27 million people in the United States above the age of 65, and podiatrists know that their freedom to move about independently is vital to both their physical and emotional health.

As a result, podiatrists are serving in hospitals and nursing homes all over the country in order to keep these older Americans on their feet. One in four nursing home patients cannot walk at all, and another one-sixth can walk only with assistance.

Older persons are a rapidly growing part of America's population, and ministering to their foot health needs is growing in importance daily.

The human foot has been described as the mirror of health. The first signs of systemic conditions such as diabetes, arthritis and circulatory disorders often appear in the foot. In fact, there is a Chinese saying which states that when you massage the foot, you massage the whole body.

Look For Symptoms

Symptoms such as dry skin, brittle nails, numbness, and discoloration should be evaluated by a professional. Unfortunately, many older people are unaware of available professional footcare. Many also simply resign themselves to enduring foot problems which could be treated if brought to the attention of a podiatrist.

Preventive foot care can increase comfort and perhaps limit the possibility of additional medical problems. Whether at home or elsewhere, good foot health offers enrichment to the lives of the aged.

Not only does preventive care reduce the chances of hospitalization, but can often help in lessening the requirements for other institutional care.

Amputation and other forms of surgery resulting from infections have been significantly reduced in recent years because of early diagnosis and treatment. Continued progress in ensuring that America's elderly can stay on their feet can be expected. Podiatric medical services are also a covered Medicare benefit.

Attention to, and professional care of, the foot should include exercise and well-fitting hose that helps keep the feet dry. Inspect the feet daily for redness, swelling, cracked skin or sores. When any of these symptoms occur, be certain to consult a podiatrist.

IN PODIATRIST'S OFFICE

Medicare Payments Available For Medical And Surgical Services

Congress recognized the important relationship between foot health and general health when it included the services of podiatrists in the Medicare legislation for senior citizens.

Doctors of podiatric medicine are of particular importance to older people by helping them to remain active. Regular foot care keeps their feet healthy with advancing years when the skin and nails of the feet become dry and brittle. The American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA) says that numbness and discoloration may be signs of serious conditions such as diabetes and circulatory disease.

The association represents most of the 12,000 podiatrists in this country, who have four years of medical training plus one to three years of postgraduate residency work, and who received 48 million patient visits last year.

APMA says that medical insurance under Medicare Part B covers most services for foot care of podiatrists and other doctors. This covers medical and surgical services in the hospital, at a skilled nursing facility, and in an office or at home. Podiatrists certify medical necessity for hospitalization, skilled nursing care and home health care.

So-called "routine foot care" payments come under Medicare insurance when it would be hazardous to the patient's health if self-treatment were performed. Pre diagnostic x-rays, laboratory tests, surgical treatments and fracture care, are also covered.

Foot Infections Covered

In addition, treatment for foot and ankle infections—stemming from in-grown nails, boils, cysts, open wounds, and other causes—generally qualify for Medicare payments.

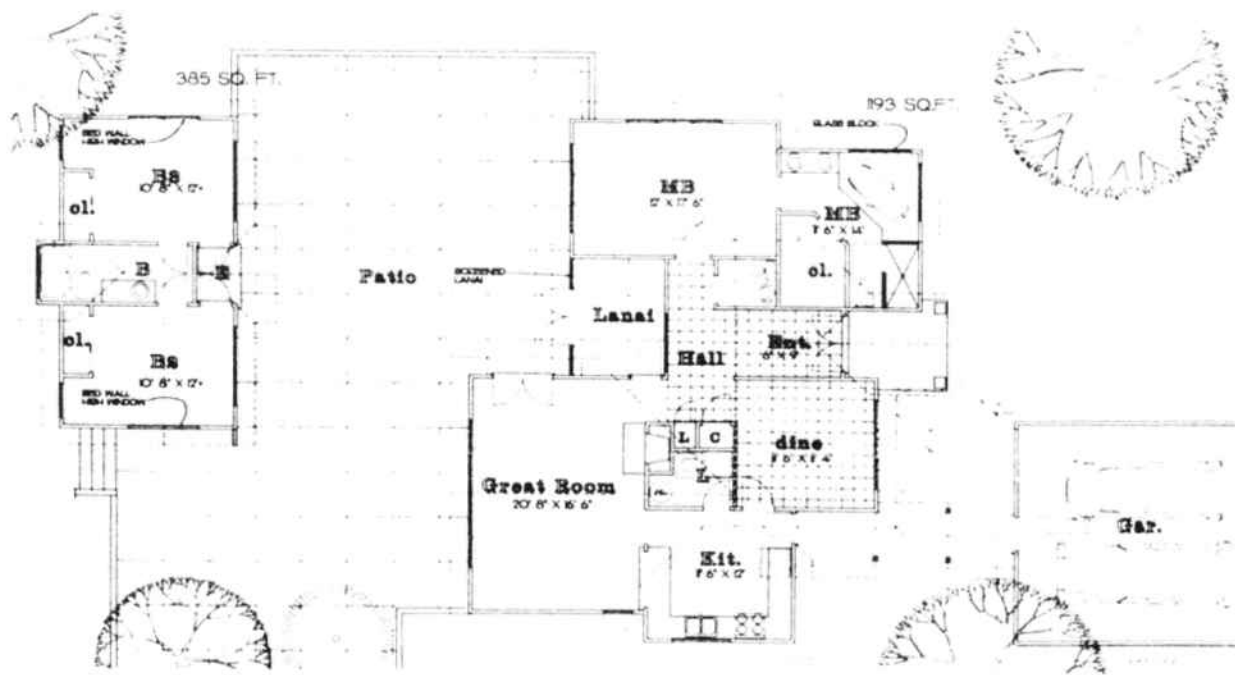
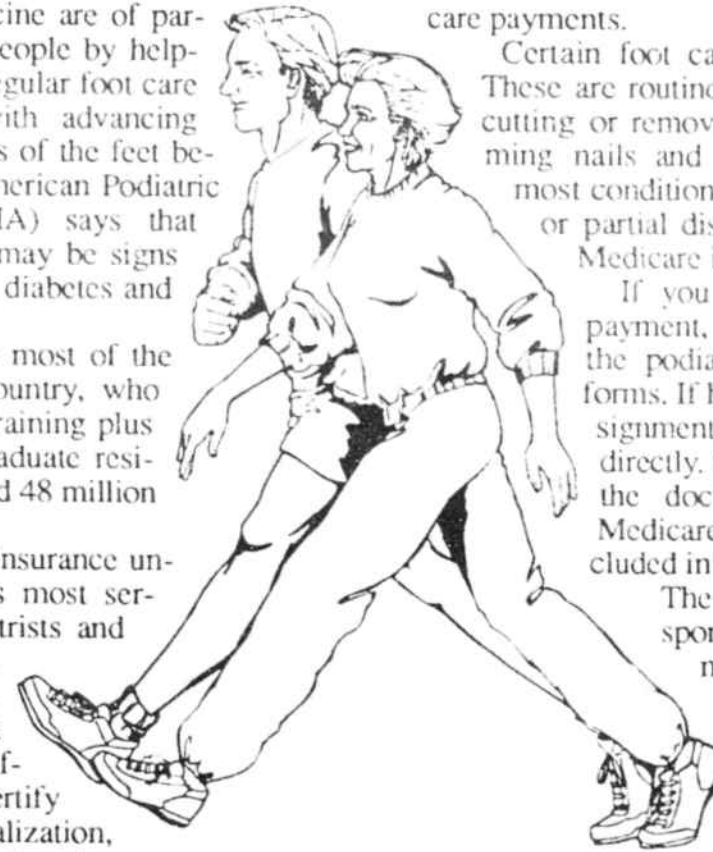
Certain foot care services are not covered. These are routine foot care treatments such as cutting or removal of corns or calluses, trimming nails and routine hygienic care under most conditions. Also, treatment for flat-foot or partial dislocations are not covered by Medicare insurance.

If you seek a Medicare insurance payment, new regulations require that the podiatrist complete the Medicare forms. If he or she accepts Medicare assignments, the payments may be made directly. Or, if you desire, you can pay the doctor and be reimbursed by Medicare. Specific instructions are included in "Your Medicare Handbook."

The podiatrist is the specialist responsible for examination, diagnosis, prevention and treatment of diseases, conditions, and malfunctions affecting the foot and its related or governing structures, by employment of medical, surgical, and other means.

Always consult a podiatrist when you have questions about foot conditions or what is covered by Medicare.

Call toll free 1-800-FOOTCARE for more information about your feet from the American Podiatric Medical Association.



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