



QUALITYPODIATRYGROUP

FOOT INFECTIONS IN LONG-TERM CARE RESIDENTS:

**Recognizing,
Preventing,
and Managing
a Common but
Serious Risk**





As we age, our feet tell a story — of years spent walking, working, and living. But in long-term care settings, they also tell another story: one of vulnerability.

Foot infections are a significant yet often underestimated concern among older adults, especially those living in nursing homes and assisted living communities.

From mild fungal infections to serious bacterial conditions like cellulitis, foot problems can escalate quickly and lead to complications that affect mobility, independence, and overall health. For residents with diabetes, circulatory issues, or neuropathy, these infections can even become limb- or life-threatening if not identified and treated promptly.

As a podiatrist providing care in long-term care facilities throughout Illinois and Florida, I've seen how early recognition and prevention make all the difference. With attentive daily care, staff education, and regular podiatric visits, most foot infections can be avoided or caught before they become serious.

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Let's take a closer look at how to recognize the early signs of infection, the common causes, and the steps facilities can take to protect their residents.



Recognizing Early Signs of Foot Infections

The first step in preventing complications is simple: awareness. Foot infections rarely appear overnight. They start subtly — a bit of redness here, a small crack in the skin there — and progress quickly when left unnoticed.

Here are some of the most common types of foot infections and what to look for:

1. Cellulitis

Cellulitis is a bacterial infection that affects the deeper layers of the skin. It often starts with a break in the skin — a small cut, a blister, or even a cracked heel — that allows bacteria to enter.

Early signs include:

- Redness, warmth, and swelling in one area of the foot or leg
- Pain or tenderness to touch
- Rapid spreading of redness
- Fever or chills in more severe cases

Left untreated, cellulitis can spread quickly and lead to serious systemic infection. Because older adults often have reduced immune responses, even mild redness or swelling should be evaluated promptly.



Fungal Infections (Athlete's Foot, Onychomycosis)

Fungal infections are among the most common foot conditions seen in long-term care residents. While they may seem minor, untreated fungal issues can lead to skin breakdown and secondary bacterial infections.

Early signs include:

- Peeling, cracking, or scaling skin between the toes
- Itching or burning
- Thickened, discolored toenails
- Odor or debris under the nails

Left untreated, cellulitis can spread quickly and lead to serious systemic infection. Because older adults often have reduced immune responses, even mild redness or swelling should be evaluated promptly.

3. Ulcers and Wounds

For residents with diabetes, neuropathy, or vascular disease, even a small sore can quickly become an ulcer. Because these residents often have reduced sensation, they may not feel pain even as a wound worsens.

Early signs include:

- Open sores, especially on pressure points (heels, toes, and the ball of the foot)
- Drainage or odor from a wound
- Redness or discoloration around the edges
- Black or brown tissue (a sign of poor circulation or necrosis)

Routine skin inspections are critical — particularly for residents with limited mobility, diabetes, or swelling.



Why Foot Infections Are So Common in Long-Term Care Facilities

Understanding the risk factors can help staff anticipate and prevent problems before they start.

Some of the most common contributing factors include:

- **Reduced circulation:** Peripheral arterial disease and aging slow blood flow, limiting oxygen and nutrient delivery to the feet and making it harder for wounds to heal.
- **Diabetes:** High blood sugar damages blood vessels and nerves, reducing sensation and the body's ability to fight infection.
- **Limited mobility:** Residents who are bedbound or chair-bound may develop pressure sores or experience swelling that increases infection risk.
- **Poorly fitting shoes or socks:** Friction and pressure can cause blisters or calluses that break down into open sores.
- **Compromised immune systems:** Many residents take medications or have chronic conditions that weaken immune responses.
- **Inadequate daily foot inspections:** Without consistent checks, small issues can go unnoticed until they become serious.



Preventive Measures: Protecting Your Residents from Foot Infections

Prevention in long-term care is a team effort. Nurses, CNAs, and podiatrists each play an important role in maintaining residents' foot health.

Here are some key preventive steps that can dramatically reduce infection risk:

1. Implement Daily Foot Checks

Encourage caregivers to inspect residents' feet daily during bathing or dressing. Look for redness, swelling, cuts, blisters, or drainage. Any changes from the previous day should be reported promptly.

For residents with diabetes or neuropathy, even a minor wound deserves attention. Early intervention can prevent hospitalization or even amputation.

2. Keep Feet Clean and Dry

Good hygiene is the foundation of prevention. Wash feet daily with mild soap and warm water, then dry thoroughly — especially between the toes. Moisture encourages fungal growth, while overly dry skin can crack and invite bacteria. Use gentle moisturizers on dry areas but avoid applying lotion between the toes.

3. Maintain Proper Nail and Skin Care

Thickened or overgrown nails can cause pressure, ingrown nails, and infections. Regular podiatric care ensures nails are trimmed correctly and safely, especially for residents on blood thinners or with diabetes. Avoid using sharp tools or cutting corns and calluses.

A podiatrist should always manage these.



4. Choose Appropriate Footwear

Shoes and socks should fit comfortably, neither too tight, nor too loose. Encourage breathable fabrics like cotton socks and shoes with adequate support. Residents with deformities or swelling may benefit from specialty footwear or inserts.

Avoid walking barefoot, even indoors, to prevent injuries.

5. Manage Chronic Conditions

Since diabetes, vascular disease, and neuropathy are major risk factors, managing these conditions is crucial. Ensure residents receive regular monitoring of blood sugar and circulation, and maintain good hydration and nutrition.

Podiatrists can help identify early vascular or neuropathic changes before they cause serious complications.

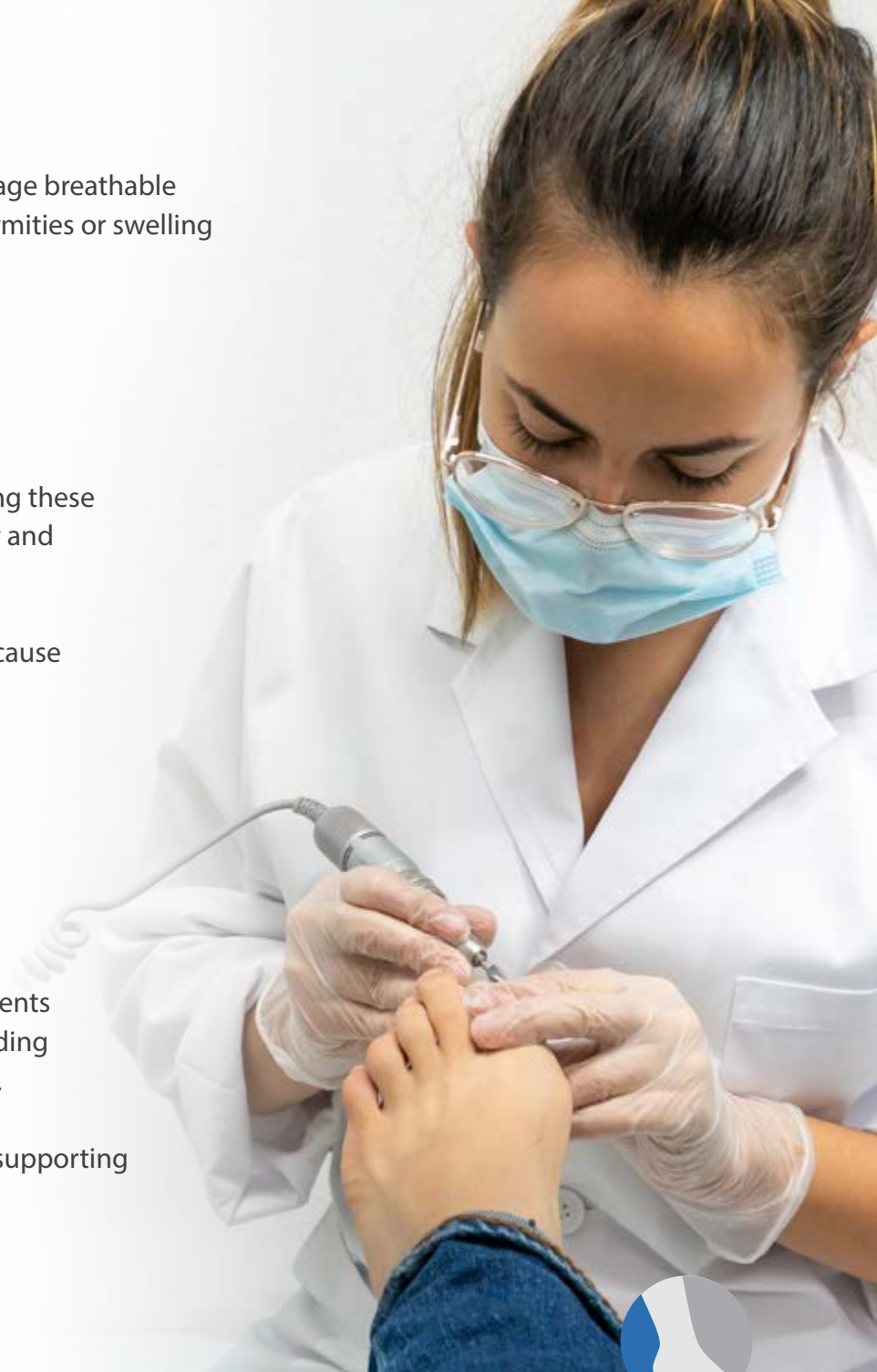
6. Schedule Routine Podiatry Visits

Consistent podiatric care in long-term care settings isn't just a convenience — it's preventive medicine. Regular visits allow for professional monitoring, early detection of issues, and immediate treatment when needed.

At Quality Podiatry Group, we provide comprehensive foot care directly to residents in nursing homes and assisted living facilities across Illinois and Florida — including nail and skin care, diabetic foot exams, wound care, and infection management.

Our goal is to help residents stay mobile, comfortable, and infection-free while supporting staff in maintaining high-quality care standards.

Contact us to schedule a consultation www.qualitypodiatry.com



When to Contact a Podiatrist Immediately

While many minor issues can be managed with basic care, certain signs require prompt podiatric evaluation:

- Sudden redness, swelling, or warmth in one area of the foot or leg
- Open wounds or ulcers that don't improve within a few days
- Drainage, odor, or pus
- Pain or tenderness, especially with fever or chills
- Black or discolored tissue
- Rapid changes in nail or skin appearance

The sooner an infection is identified, the better the outcome. Infections caught early can often be treated with topical or oral medication, while delayed treatment may require hospitalization or advanced wound care.

The Bigger Picture: Foot Health Equals Quality of Life

Foot infections aren't just a medical issue — they're a quality-of-life issue.

Pain, swelling, and mobility loss affect independence, increase fall risk, and reduce participation in daily activities.

By prioritizing preventive foot care, facilities not only reduce medical complications but also promote dignity, comfort, and overall well-being for their residents.

Every healthy step is a step toward a better quality of life.

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Collaboration with Long-Term Care Facilities for Better Outcomes

Long-term care is about collaboration. When nursing teams, administrators, and podiatrists work together, residents receive proactive care rather than reactive treatment.

Quality Podiatry Group partners with nursing homes and assisted living communities throughout Illinois and Florida to deliver compassionate, comprehensive foot care right where residents live. From routine nail and skin care to infection prevention and wound management, our focus is keeping your residents mobile, safe, and comfortable — while supporting staff with education and communication every step of the way.

Foot Infections in LTC Facilities Are Common but Not Inevitable.

Foot infections in long-term care settings are common — but they don't have to be inevitable. With awareness, vigilance, and preventive care, facilities can dramatically reduce infection rates and improve residents' overall health and quality of life.

By recognizing early warning signs, implementing daily care routines, and partnering with podiatric specialists, nursing homes and assisted living facilities can ensure every resident takes those next steps in comfort and confidence.

Partner with Quality Podiatry Group for Proactive Foot Care

Call us today to schedule a consultation or learn more about our services— and give your residents the professional care their feet deserve.

For Illinois facilities: 773.321.2681

For Florida facilities: 786.975.2090

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