



## Winter Uptick of Cracked Heels

Cracked heels (a.k.a. heel fissures) can occur year-round, but the cold, dry air of winter raises the risk. Skin on the heel dries out, loses elasticity, thickens, and develops small cracks. Other contributors to dry skin include diminished skin oil production, which tends to occur as we get older, certain medications, frequent hot showers, harsh soaps, and standing for long periods of time. Walkers, runners, and swimmers are more susceptible, too.

Minor surface cracks might amount to nothing more than a petty annoyance — their aesthetically unappealing look, maybe itchiness, possibly some skin flaking. Deeper cracks may cause pain, redness, swelling, some bleeding, and possibly infection, as cracks open the doors to harmful bacteria. Walking may also become a chore. An appointment with our office is strongly recommended.

For those who have diabetes with peripheral neuropathy (reduced sensitivity to pain, temperature, and pressure changes), even seemingly minor cracks can quickly escalate into ulcers and infections. Daily foot inspections are critical. Diabetics should seek prompt podiatric care for any foot abnormalities.

In addition to the physical effects of cracked heels, they can more quickly wear out socks and stockings — thickened, rough-edged skin constantly tugs at sock fibers.

At our office, debridement (removal of dead skin), prescription creams to heal and moisturize, and orthotic devices such as heel cups are common treatments for cracked heels. We can also offer guidance on moisturizing, pumice stones, and proper footwear. Lower your risk for dry feet:

- Drink plenty of water.
- Use moisturizing lotion (but not between the toes).
- Clean and thoroughly dry feet daily (including between the toes).
- Eat a well-balanced diet that includes plenty of omega-3 fatty acids.



# Your Back and Feet Depend on Each Other

Sometimes the pain in your foot has its origins elsewhere. Same thing for back pain. That's why ignoring persistent pain or discomfort just leads to further issues.

For example, spinal nerves can become compressed, especially at the nerve roots (where the nerve exits the spine). Pain, a tingling sensation, numbness, cramping, and swelling in the feet might result. Foot drop might come into play, too — a condition in which it's difficult to lift the front of one's foot while walking. Sometimes discomfort will run the whole length of the leg. Some back conditions that compress nerves include a herniated disk, degenerative disk disease, spondylolisthesis (when a vertebra slips over the one below it), and spinal stenosis (a narrowing of bony pathways for nerves or the spinal cord).

Conversely, unaddressed podiatric problems can lead to knee, hip, and back pain. People with flat feet, for instance, often overpronate, with the feet rolling inward excessively while walking or running. This places extra pressure on the ankle and can cause misalignment and discomfort that may eventually head north.

In most situations, when one experiences foot pain/discomfort, they change the way they walk to alleviate the pain. This compensation places extra strain somewhere else and causes negative changes in joint function. Hammertoes, bunions, ingrown toenails, corns, calluses, and leg-length discrepancies are examples of conditions that, if ignored, can spread their "cheer" elsewhere.

**A friendly reminder:** Proper footwear — good fit, roomy toe box, excellent arch support, and good cushioning — can help avoid a lot of foot, ankle, and back problems.

If you experience foot or ankle pain, don't ignore it. Schedule an appointment with our office for a thorough evaluation, accurate diagnosis, and effective treatment.

## Mark Your Calendars

- Feb. 2** Groundhog Day: In a pinch, groundhogs can scurry up trees.
- Feb. 11** Super Bowl: Minnesota Vikings ... played in four Super Bowls ... never had the lead.
- Feb. 13** Fasnacht Day: Traditional Pennsylvania Dutch fasnachts are square or triangular, potato-based, and crispy.
- Feb. 14** Valentine's Day: Rose petals are edible, and rose water (from petals soaked in water) is often added to jellies/jams.
- Feb. 14** Ash Wednesday: Earliest possible date is Feb. 4, which next occurs in 2285.
- Feb. 19** Presidents' Day: Ronald Reagan broke the "every-20-years curse." From 1840 onward, every U.S. president elected in a year ending in zero had died in office.
- Feb. 29** Leap Year's Day: To make the leap year cut, years ending in "00" must also be divisible by 400.





# Cozying Up to Dark Chocolate

Many people fall head over heels for chocolate of any kind. But for the most health benefits, dark chocolate is the way to go — in moderation.

Both dark and milk chocolate contain flavonoids — natural compounds with antioxidant properties that emanate from cacao plants (the cocoa bean shells and fat) — but the amount is much higher in dark chocolate. Fifty percent to 90% of dark chocolate's ingredients are derived from cacao plants; milk chocolate, 10%–50%. Other beneficial properties are more evident in dark chocolate, too:

- **A good source of iron.** Women aged 19–50 need over twice as much iron per day as men. Might be why women are generally more gaga for chocolate than men.
- **Possible improved heart health.** Research published in *Reviews in Cardiovascular Medicine* in 2018 found promising improvements in lipid panels and blood pressure when eating a moderate amount of dark chocolate every couple of days.
- **Cognitive improvement.** In a randomized control trial published in *Nutrients* in 2019, daily intake of dark chocolate for 30 days improved cognitive function in trial participants.
- **Good for the skin.** Manganese in dark chocolate supports the production of collagen, which helps keep skin younger and healthier looking.

Of course, there are obvious drawbacks, too. Chocolate is replete with saturated fat and added sugars, which, with consistent overindulgence, raise the risk of high cholesterol, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. Additionally, in 2022, *Consumer Reports* found that 23 out of 28 popular dark chocolate brands had high levels of lead and cadmium, which contribute to developmental issues, kidney problems, hypertension, and weakened immune systems.

A healthy relationship with chocolate is to stay in touch from time to time. Going steady is ill-advised.



# Roasted Lemon Oregano Shrimp

Servings: 4

*A fast and fancy, Greek-inspired recipe to serve over pasta, rice, couscous, polenta, or all on its own. This dish checks all the boxes for a romantic Valentine's Day dinner.*

## Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh oregano leaves
- Finely grated zest of 1 large lemon
- Pinch of red pepper flakes
- 2 tablespoons of dry white wine
- Juice of 1 large lemon (about 3 tablespoons)
- 1 pound of peeled, deveined, and uncooked medium shrimp
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Cooked polenta, pasta, rice, or couscous for serving (optional)

## Directions

1. Arrange a rack in the middle of the oven and heat to 400°F.
2. Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a medium saucepan over low heat. Stir in the garlic, oregano, red pepper flakes, and lemon zest, and stir over low heat for 2 minutes. Stir in the wine and lemon juice, and keep the mixture warm over very low heat.
3. Meanwhile, pat the shrimp dry and transfer to a rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle with the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil, sprinkle generously with salt and black pepper, toss to evenly coat, and spread into an even layer.
4. Roast, stirring halfway through, until they just turn pink and opaque, 6 to 8 minutes total.
5. Remove the shrimp from the oven, transfer them to the saucepan with the lemon and oregano sauce, and toss to combine. Serve immediately over cooked pasta, rice, couscous, or creamy polenta.

Recipe courtesy of [www.thekitchn.com](http://www.thekitchn.com).

# WINTER SPECIAL

## CLARUS

\*medical strength antifungal solution to treat fungal nails

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EXPIRES: FEB 28

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## Laser-Focused on Your Foot and Ankle Health

Lasers in podiatry have a wide range of effective uses, including the removal of plantar warts and ingrown toenails, restoration of fungal nails, and the promotion of healing and/or pain reduction for conditions such as arthritis, plantar fasciitis, tendonitis, and diabetic foot ulcers.

Light energy from lasers stimulates intercellular activity at the injured area, reducing pain, accelerating healing, and improving circulation (which elevates the amount of oxygen and nutrients arriving on the scene). There is typically minimal downtime on the road to recovery, and the healing process is less painful (and quicker!).

The treatment session itself is painless (you may feel a warm sensation in the area), and lasers enable podiatrists to treat foot and ankle conditions at the source, unlike topical treatments. A treatment generally takes 15 minutes — but can vary depending on how large an area is being addressed — so it won't put a big crimp in the rest of your day. And there are no side effects.

Laser therapy might not be covered by your insurance, depending on the condition, which would mean more out-of-pocket costs compared to other noninvasive treatments. A series of laser treatments may be required for optimum healing.

Many other conservative treatments do a fine job in alleviating pain and facilitating healing, but it's great to know you have an enhanced healing option waiting in the wings if your condition is conducive to it and you are willing.

Lingering foot or ankle discomfort is never normal. A thorough evaluation, accurate diagnosis, and effective treatment are only a phone call away.

