

Podiatrist vs. Orthopedic Surgeon:

What Is the Difference?

If you're experiencing foot pain, you need professional help, but where do you turn? Do you choose a podiatrist or an orthopedic surgeon? The answer depends on what your issues are and what treatment you require.

What a Podiatrist Does

A podiatrist is completely focused on issues of the foot. In most cases, podiatrists treat corns, calluses, bunions, heel spurs, ingrown toenails, infections, arthritis, and diabetes-related foot problems. They use medications, physical therapy, and surgery to treat these conditions. Podiatrists must be licensed, having completed a four-year podiatry program (after completing an undergraduate education). They must also pass state and national examinations. Podiatrists who perform surgery also complete surgical training and are experienced in performing foot-related procedures.

Often podiatrists have their own solo practices, but they may also work in hospitals, comprehensive healthcare offices, and health clinics.

What an Orthopedic Surgeon Does

An orthopedic surgeon is a medical doctor who specializes in issues of the musculoskeletal system. A foot and ankle surgeon specifically evaluates foot problems but can also review other orthopedic issues that may be contributing to foot and ankle pain.

Orthopedic surgeons use medical and physical methods, including rehabilitation and surgery, to treat patients. They can address sports injuries, treat foot and ankle trauma, and perform reconstructive procedures.

To be a member of the American Orthopaedic Foot & Ankle Society, a physician must have graduated from a four-year medical school, having studied surgery, internal medicine, clinical sciences, family medicine, and other specialties. Following that, the physician must complete a five-year residency in orthopedic surgery and pass a national medical licensing examination. An orthopedic surgeon may also complete advanced fellowship training in foot and ankle surgery, as well as continuing medical education credits. Membership also requires being board certified or board eligible by the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery or the American Osteopathic Board of Orthopedic Surgery.



When you need medical attention for foot pain, be sure you know what kind of medical professional is managing your treatment. Take time to ask about medical school education, areas of specialization, residency training, and experience with your particular issue.

If you are experiencing foot pain and are seeking the care of an expert, please call 940.898.0629 for a physician referral.