

# footprints

An informational newsletter for patients of APMA member podiatrists

Winter 2007

## Skiing and Your Feet

Shush, shush, shush. That's not the sound of a teacher asking the kids to be quiet--it's the sound of your skis pushing through fresh powder as you head down the slopes. As with most other sports, you need to keep close attention to your feet when choosing ski boots and when preparing your feet for skiing.

Every pair of feet is different, and boot manufacturers design ski boots to fit a variety of feet. When choosing ski boots for either buying or renting, it's important to remember that the boots need to be comfortable. It is best to have a professional work with you to fit your boots. Try to find a technician who is familiar with foot types and boot lasts. This will ensure that you choose the right boot for your foot and for your ability.

Since ski boots do not allow normal gait and limit the flexion at the ankle, the orthotics that you wear every day are not appropriate for insertion into your ski boots. Special orthotics for skiing can be designed and developed by a podiatric physician, when necessary. When purchasing new boots, you will need to bring those boots to your Doctor of Podiatric Medicine (DPM) so that your foot can be evaluated with the boot.

If you want to ensure that your feet stay comfortable and warm as you manage the moguls, consider purchasing toe heaters. The heaters have a small disk that can be placed in the sock or under an orthotic. Combined with a rechargeable battery pack, these heaters can provide a heat source throughout the day.

Finally, the socks you choose can make the difference in how long you're able to tolerate the temperatures. When your feet are dry, they feel warmer. Look for socks with wicking ability.



## Sock it to Me—Your Socks Have Gone High Tech

New technology has invaded our homes and our offices. It's become essential in how we correspond with one another, how we drive our cars and even how we stay warm in winter. Even the socks we wear have undergone transformations that relate to technology.

New technology has made fabrics healthier, more comfortable, and better looking than ever. Using fabrics like cotton and getting away from synthetic materials can help keep feet dry, leaving them comfortable and blister-free. Since your feet and legs spend several months of the year covered in footwear, it is essential to choose the right sock for your needs. From fabric to fit, making sure your footwear has all the latest features is key.

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## Tips for Snowboarding

Since boots for snowboarding differ from ski boots, here are a few tips to keep in mind when purchasing or renting snowboard boots.

- In snowboarding, the heel drives everything. So a snug, firm fit is important. A boot that is too loose is a safety hazard. The heel should be stable in all directions in order to ensure maximum performance.
- To determine a proper fit when trying on a snowboard boot, you must completely lace the boot and stand up in it. This will allow the heel to settle back into the boot.
- Try on your boots while wearing a thin synthetic sock. Wearing a sock that is too heavy will prevent a proper fit. Synthetic socks are preferred to control moisture as well as prevent friction. •

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Here are some tips to choose socks that are right for you and the occasion.

- A sock with a poly/cotton blend, incorporating cotton and synthetics, is an excellent combination for everyday wear. Opting for either a thick or thin sock will not affect the health of your feet.
- Socks should fit like a glove. There should be no loose fabric around toes or heels. Socks that bunch up can cause friction and lead to blisters. Socks that are too tight can decrease circulation and comfort.
- If you have diabetes or decreased circulation, seamless socks are now available to prevent friction that might result in irritation.
- Athletes should look for socks that wick moisture away from the foot. The best material is a cotton/polyester blend which will provide excellent comfort level, great wear, and moisture absorption.
- All socks should be tried with the appropriate shoes. Don't try your running socks on with your dress shoes--that's a recipe for buying the wrong socks.
- Ask your podiatric physician for recommendations. The technology involved can be overwhelming, but your DPM can provide you with the appropriate guidance that matches your sport. •

## Dry Skin and Winter Itch

Colder temperatures each winter bring many Americans one big problem: dry, cracked skin. Those itchy, dry patches are nature's way of letting us know that the outer layer of our skin, made up of dead skin cells, natural oils and lipids (fats), needs help.

Cold weather and lower humidity as a result of indoor heating can strip away the skin's natural protective layer and wreak havoc with our skin's ability to stay moisturized. In extreme cases, if not treated, some of these dry areas can deteriorate into painful cracked and bleeding skin, particularly around the feet and ankles. A quick trip to your local drug store will show, however, that there is no limit to the number of products that are designed to alleviate dry skin.

If your skin is excessively dry and certainly if you have any cracking on your feet or heels, you should visit with your podiatric physician. Your doctor will diagnose and help you treat your feet so that you can get these conditions under control. Many DPMs can dispense creams and lotions right in the office or make recommendations for the best products for your particular condition.

## Frostbite

Did you know that nearly half of all frostbite cases involve the foot and ankle? That's a staggering figure, but avoiding frostbite and treating it quickly are both important lessons we can learn.

According to your podiatric physician, the most effective way of dealing with frostbite is to prevent it from occurring in the first place. If you know you will be exposed to the cold weather, following these tips can literally save your toes:

- Drink plenty of water, avoid alcohol, and dress appropriately.
- If you begin to feel pain, numbness, or tingling in your feet, get out of the cold as soon as possible.
- Seek professional help as soon as possible from your podiatric physician for any foot- or ankle-related concerns.

Prolonged exposure to extremely cold temperatures can lead to severe injury if proper treatment is not provided in a timely manner. Signs and symptoms of frostbite include:

- Pain or prickling progressing to numbness
- Pale, hard, and cold skin with waxy appearance
- Flushing due to blood rushing to area after it's re-warmed
- Burning sensation and swelling from collected fluid that may last for weeks
- Blisters
- Black scab-like crust, which may develop several weeks later

Mild frostbite is treated by re-warming the affected area, washing it with an antiseptic, and applying a sterile dressing. If medical care is not available immediately, seek shelter and re-warm a mildly frostbitten area in warm water (101° to 104° F) or by repeatedly applying warm cloths to the area for 30 minutes. Never use hot water, fire, a heating pad, or other dry heat because these methods may burn the skin before the feeling returns.

Frostbite is a very serious injury that can involve significant damage to the feet. In severe cases, surgery may even be necessary, depending on the depth and extent of tissue damage. Therefore, prompt diagnosis and proper treatment by a podiatric physician is essential. •



The APMA recommends a number of products for handling dry skin. These products carry the APMA Seal of Approval and can be found in most drug stores. For more information about these products, and others carrying the APMA Seal, ask your podiatric physician or contact the APMA at 1-800-FOOTCARE. •