

Outdoors health tips from the posse

Your feet are the tires for your body

BY MARK RACKAY

No matter what your outdoor activity involves — hunting, backpacking, camping, hiking, skiing or fishing, or bike riding, your feet are most likely what is going to carry you around. It is important to get out and about and to pay attention to the warning signs your feet may be giving you.

If your feet are sore after a hike there are scores of things that could be causing the problem. You will want to rule out any of the more serious problems with a check up from your doctor. For our purposes, we will assume that you do not have any bone, blood vessel, nerve or lymphatic problem and just have sore feet from hiking.

The first area I would look at is your pack. A pack that has too much weight or is unevenly distributed can show up as foot pain. Always use a pack that has a sternum (chest) strap and a padded hip belt to distribute the weight. Try adjusting and tightening the various straps on your pack and experiment with the balance. Getting the weight evenly distributed will take some playing around but it will get you some relief to your feet. If none of this helps, consider a new pack.

The next area to consider is your footwear. If you have been wearing the same pair of boots for several years, it is time to give them a good inspection. Boots, like all outdoor equipment, get worn out and tired.

Start by checking the treads. Worn tread or uneven wear indicates it is time for replacement. Look at the laces and be certain they are secure and not showing signs of wear. Visually inspect the exterior for tears, wear marks or stitching that has torn. Most of this damage is not repairable and new footwear should be considered.

One thing that has really helped me is a good set of aftermarket insoles. I use them in just about all my shoes. You can check which type of insole would work best for your feet with a simple test, available at most drug stores and sporting goods shops. You stand on a gel pad and the colors that appear show stress areas for your foot. Based on this, the proper insole can be suggested for your needs. There are insoles available for all types of foot problems such as high arches, falling arches, heel pain and general cushioning. Those with a chronic pain problem might consider having a pair of custom insoles made for them. Again, here is where your doctor can help.

Another area of concern would be your socks. A pair of socks that doesn't fit prop-



No matter how you get out and about this spring, your feet are going to be involved. Here, Jared Geigley, Jim Neigherbauer, Kathy Fowler and Dave Fowler are giving their feet a workout. (Submitted photo/Mark Rackay)

erly can cause all sorts of problems. A sock that slides around inside the boot will create friction, and therefore heat, leading to foot pain. For serious hiking, purchase a good pair of socks that is taller than the top of your boots. You don't want the top of your boot rubbing a raw spot on your leg.

Staying properly hydrated while outdoors is especially important to your feet. There are incredible numbers of sweat glands in your feet and you must keep supplying them with blood flow. Proper hydration means a good blood flow for your entire body.

Drinking something that contains electrolytes will be supportive. This will help all your muscles work at peak capacity, including all of the intricate foot muscles. If you have foot cramps after your hike that is a sure sign you need electrolytes.

Having somewhat sore feet after a hike is normal. Realize that all the weight bearing your feet did during the hike will leave them

a little bit sore, no matter what you do. It's part of the game.

When the soreness escalates into an unbearable pain, and you feel like you just completed the Bataan Death March, back off your hiking distance and lighten up that pack while you try some of the above tips. If nothing helps, it is time to see a foot specialist and get to the bottom of your foot pain. Burning and sore feet, which don't feel better quickly, are not normal. Sore feet are a sign that something in your hiking routine needs to be changed.

Keeping your feet happy is a key to getting out and about. Be sure to pay attention to the warning signs your feet give you. Until next time, stay healthy and enjoy the outdoors.

Mark Rackay is a freelance writer who serves as a Director and spokesman for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspt.org ●