

## Beating cold feet



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

I am one of those guys with cold feet. Not the kind of “cold feet” you get when you are about to be married. The kind of cold feet you get when outdoors in the winter months. This problem has gotten worse as I have aged. My feet get cold whenever my wife is looking for me to do one of the chores on her endless list. They act like an early warning system that she is looking for me, giving me the opportunity to go hide.

Your feet are also an early warning system for the rest of your body. When the feet begin to get cold, it is an indication you should take action. Failure to heed the warning of cold extremities can lead to hypothermia. When the mercury vanishes from the thermometer, your body concentrates on keeping your core warm. The core is where all the vital organs are located.

The blood vessels in your extremities begin to constrict, thereby limiting the flow of blood to these parts. The first sign is cold-to-the-touch fingers, hands, toes, feet and ears.

If you have cold extremities when not outside in the cold, it could mean a medical condition exists. In the event you are a smoker, or have high blood pressure, a history of cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol or diabetes, cold hands and feet could be a sign of blockages in the blood vessels.

When your fingers and toes are often cold, and they turn a whitish color, you may want to be checked for Raynaud’s Disease. This disease can be aggravated by cold weather or stress.

For our purposes here, we will assume that you are just dealing with cold feet because it is winter outside and you are out there recreating. If such were the case, there are some things you can do to take care of them cold feet.

Begin each day warm. Start out with warm hands, feet and core. Wear the proper clothing for the weather and the day’s activity. If you are freezing when you start out, don’t expect to warm up as you go along. Don’t make your body play catch-up.

Start out by keeping your core warm. The core of your body has the job of heating up the blood and sending it back out to the extremities to



Winter boots, socks and more are sometimes necessary to stay warm. (Submitted photo/ Mark Rackay)

keep them warm. Wear the proper clothes over the core and dress in layers. As soon as you feel a chill, add another layer.

You can layer your feet also. If you are facing extreme cold, a 2 or 3 layer system may be necessary. First layer should be a lightweight, moisture wicking sock (no cotton). Second layer can be a lightweight wool sock, followed by a third layer of a heavy wool sock when necessary.

Naturally, those layers will not fit into a regular hiking boot. For that bulk, you will need to consider bigger sized Pac boots. Cramming a foot layered with socks into too small of a boot is worse than not enough socks. The tightness will inhibit circulation, causing the feet to become cold quickly.

Heavy and bulky boots are great for sitting outside and limited activity. They are also workable for short hikes, such as the walk out to go ice fishing. If you are looking at a long and strenuous walk, the large boots can be very clumsy. You certainly don’t want to wear them driving a car either.

Boots are available with varying amounts of insulation, from 200 grams up to 2,000. This alone does not necessarily mean warmth., it just means there is a layer of insulation between the

fabrics, and how thick it may be.

Waterproof is an absolute must and once again, Gore-Tex is your friend. If you choose regular leather boots a good coating of a waterproofing agent is a must. Once boots become wet, it can freeze and take your toes down with it.

Any of the heavier winter boots come with a thick sole. That thick sole is not insulation, and you will lose heat faster through the sole than anywhere else, especially when standing. I recommend adding an extra thick and hardy insole to your winter boots. This is in addition to the one your boots probably came with.

Whenever you are going to be walking in snow, a pair of snow gaiters really helps. These gaiters will cover your laces and up the calf of your leg. This helps keep your pants dry and go will help keep your calf warm. It also helps keep your laces from becoming a frozen mess that can only be untied with a pocketknife.

Moisture, be it from perspiration or snow, is the enemy of warm feet. The feet must be kept dry if they are to stay warm. If you are doing a strenuous activity outdoors and notice the feet beginning to sweat, pay attention to this. Once the activity stops, your feet will begin to

get cold.

On any trip, it is a great idea to carry extra socks along. In the event you notice perspiration on your feet, or you do a one-legger through the ice and fill a boot full of water, you have a dry pair to change into, and thus, save the day.

On a multi-day trip, it can be very difficult to keep footwear dry. It is not practical, in many instances, to carry a second pair of boots along. Starting out the day in wet boots is a disaster that is only going to get worse as the day goes along.

If electricity is available, one of those boot dryers can be worth their weight in gold. Remove the insoles and allow them to dry separately. Remember that when it is really cold, those boots will not air dry. They will just freeze solid, making putting them on in the morning a real treat.

If no electricity is available, consider opening up the boots as much as possible and drying them by the campfire. Caution must be exercised, as I have destroyed more than one pair over a campfire. Keep them far enough away so as not to melt the soles.

There are available feet warmers. The air activated packets of these can be placed in your boots and provide some heat for several

hours. These are especially useful if your activity level is going to be low. I have used the toe warmer models and found them to be one step below useless in keeping feet warm.

There are also several electric models out there that work well if you don’t mind the extra weight. Be careful with any foot warmers in relying on them. Murphy’s law will usually chime in here, and the batteries will run out leaving you with cold feet. So be certain you have a bac up plan.

Instead of all the gadgets, I would opt for layering with good socks, and having a quality, waterproof and well-insulated pair of boots. Spend your time keeping your feet dry, start out with warm feet, and keep them warm.

As I write this, I notice my feet are starting to turn numb. My wife must be looking for me. I need to make myself disappear.

*Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff’s Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email [info@mcspi.org](mailto:info@mcspi.org)*



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