

# Tips on finding the right sock for outdoor activity



## Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

An often overlooked part of our outdoor gear would be the socks. We pay a great deal of attention to footwear, as my closet will attest to, but very little thought goes into what socks we wear.

I am guilty of sock neglect. Usually, I buy a bundle pack of a dozen pair of tube socks. The socks are all the same, so when one falls apart, I don't have to dispose of the pair. I call it frugal, but my wife calls it a disaster.

My socks get abused. I walk around outside in them all the time. My socks, which were once white, now have holes everywhere and are a grey-grass stained color. All of them. I hate slippers, so I just run around sock footed.

To stop my wife's complaining, I don't buy white socks anymore. She claimed they were impossible to get clean. She refuses to darn the holes of a 40-cent pair of socks. On a more serious note, we would all benefit from paying attention to the types of socks we use outdoors.

An average person will take approximately 2,000 steps to walk one mile. If you add into the equation, uphill, downhill, side hill, perspiration and wetness, you will soon realize that socks are just as important as boots and shoes. You would not put retread tires on your Ferrari sports car, now would you?

When you are choosing socks for your chosen outdoors adventure, consider four things: sock height, cushioning, construction material and fit. Each of these plays an important role in foot comfort and health.

Let's start out with sock fit. Proper sock size is just as important as getting the proper sized shoe, and maybe more so. Socks that are too big can develop "wrinkles" that can rub your raw and leave you with a blister. When the sock is too small for your foot, the squeezing of your toes will drive you crazy.



Proper socks are just as important as proper boots and shoes. Here are some tips for finding the right socks for your chosen outdoor activity. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

Start with measuring the actual size of your foot rather than your shoe size. Sometimes we "size-up" our shoes, which leads to buying socks that are too large.

Try on socks rather than just buying the pairs off the rack. Stay away from packages that say "for sizes 6 through 12" because a proper fit is impossible. Look for a snug but not tight fit. The heel cup of the sock should line up perfectly with the heel of your foot.

Socks come in many different heights, from ankles all the way to darn near your waist. Rule of thumb: sock height should exceed the height of your footwear. I learned this the hard way on a trip to Argentina. Ten days of my high top boots rubbing a hole in my leg was a new experience in pain. That wound took nearly three months to finally heal and left me with a scar to remind me of my "sock sin."

No-show and ankle height socks should be left to the runners and low-top trail shoe wearers. These socks will protect your ankle bone, but little else. These are great for workouts and exercise where perspiration is a consideration.

Crew length socks land just a few inches above the ankle bone. Mid-length boots and trail shoes all work fine with this height sock. There is no reason you can't wear crew height socks with running shoes other than they could be warm on a hot day.

High socks, those that approach the knee, are for extreme outdoor activities. High socks protect against the rubbing caused by big, high-topped boots, especially around your shins and calves. I wish I had a few pairs of high socks on that Argentina trip.

We talk about cushioning inserts for shoes, but cushioning is just as important for socks. Cushioning gives you an idea of how warm the sock will be. The proper amount of cushioning will depend on what your chosen activity will be.

Cushioning helps protect your feet from the impacts of running, hiking and backpacking, similar to the inserts of your shoes and boots. Too much cushioning, meaning a thicker sock, can cause your feet to perspire. You are going to have to experiment to find just what socks are right for you.

Ultra-light socks have no cushioning, making them suitable for hot weather. On the downside, they provide no padding for foot protection. Many people use a pair of ultra-light socks for liners with heavier socks in cold weather. Most of the better-made hiking socks of today no longer require a liner sock. I have not used liners in years.

Light-to-medium cushioning is probably where most of your sock drawer will land. These are great for warm weather and provide moisture-wicking if you

choose the proper material. Look for cushioning around the key places of your foot, like the ball and heel. Usually, they are warm enough with the proper boots or shoes for moderate weather conditions.

Heavy cushioned socks are the thickest and most cushioned available. I have seen these so thick they could almost double as a sleeping bag. These are the socks you want for the activities during the harshest of weather. These socks will work well for low movement activities in cold, such as ice fishing or sitting on stand. You will not want to wear these socks on a summertime hike up the Matterhorn.

Modern day outdoor socks are made from a blend of materials, rather than from a single fabric. Wool is the most popular material and highly recommended by experts. Wool will maintain insulation qualities, even when wet.

Wool has a natural antimicrobial agent, so it does not give off the odors of similar synthetic materials. Most socks are made of merino wool, which is itch-free compared to the old-fashioned wool type socks. The best socks will be a blend of merino wool and a synthetic material to enhance fast drying and moisture wicking qualities.

Polyester and nylon are two types of synthetic material often used. Both of these materials dry quickly and add durability to the

other materials. Silk is a material used mostly in liner socks. While it is comfortable and moisture wicking, silk is not very durable and wears quickly.

Spandex is a material I use that I have had good results with. Many hiking socks of medium cushioning use a small percentage of spandex. Spandex is an elastic material that helps socks hold their shape and prevent bunching up or wrinkling.

Like anything else, quality socks cost more. If the price of the socks seems "too good to be true," caveat emptor, because it probably is. On a trip deep into the jungles of Argentina is probably not the best place to realize you have the wrong socks.

I have started buying better quality socks but it has led to a certain amount of marital troubles because my wife does not want me wearing them outside. I don't care what she says. I am not wearing slippers.

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## SNOW RANGER

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If there is enough snow, you and your friends can build a snow fort complete with your own artistic touches of snow sculptures or snow angels out front. Or, make frozen bubbles! There are lots of other ideas and games in the booklet to get you acquainted with the winter environment.

Want to know how much snow is in your backyard? Or how much water will result when the snow eventually melts? Scientist call this "snow-water equivalency" and you can figure it out with

a yardstick, a measuring cup and of course, a little math!

Safety in the outdoors is important all the time, but in winter, it is imperative! To become a Junior Snow Ranger you need to know a few important concepts such as: "dressing like an onion" in layers (base, middle and outer layer); go exploring with a buddy, never alone (an adult is a good companion); stay on marked trails and designated areas and always pay attention to signs and instructions; pace yourself — don't go too fast, and figure out when you need to turn around to get back; go with

someone that knows first aid and can identify hypothermia and hypoglycemia (low blood sugar); and make sure you have the "10 essentials" for your pack (outwear, drinking water, map/compass, pocketknife, sunscreen, duct tape, whistle, headlamp and a space blanket). And, remember to "hug a tree" if you feel like you are lost. Staying near a tree offers some protection from the elements, and keeps lost children in the same place, which makes it easier for searchers to find them.

A winter outing can be a great time to try a new challenge like walking with snowshoes or

cross-country skiing. There are several places where you can rent snowshoes or cross-country skis in Montrose, Cedaredge, Grand Junction and Hotchkiss. Odin Recreation at the entrance to Powderhorn has ski rental and offers instruction.

Visit the "Need Gear?" section on the FOYAN website (friendsofyouthandnature.org) for a list of gear providers in Montrose, Mesa and Delta counties.

Ridgway State Park also has snowshoes that can be used within the park. It is best to call ahead for availability.

And if your children become

hooked on growing up to be a Snow Ranger, track down and interview one. Lucky for us, the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre Gunnison National Forest has several on staff! This may be just the endeavor to spark a life-long enthusiasm for winter in your child, and may lead to a future snow ranger caring for our public lands.

Friends of Youth and Nature is a nonprofit that promotes opportunities for youth and families to get outside, experience outdoor activities, and explore nature. To learn more, visit [www.friendsofyouthandnature.org](http://www.friendsofyouthandnature.org)



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