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Foot Care Basics For Hikers:

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Prevention and Treatment for Athletes"

Being Proactive or Reactive

Every hiker, from the first-timer to the experienced, must make the choice to be either reactive or proactive in managing blisters. Being reactive means taping hot spots and fixing blisters when they develop. It means making fixes under less than ideal conditions, with less than adequate materials and in a manner that does not work for your particular foot problem. Being proactive, on the other hand, means discovering before a trip, what works for your feet and knowing how to treat any potential problems before they develop. This means knowing what resources are available to use and trying out blister fixes before the hike. It can also include pre-hike taping of your feet where hot spots and blisters typically develop. Being proactive means doing your homework.

It is essential to have shoes that fit properly, are broken in, and are appropriate for the terrain and weather you will encounter. Find the best socks for your feet, preferably ones that wick moisture away from the skin. Some racers like single-layer socks, others like double-layer, and still others use a two-sock combination.

Preventing hot spots and blisters requires knowledge of what is best for your feet. Some feet respond well to lubricants while others are best when powders keep them dry. Others require taping to protect hot spots and blister prone areas. There are several types of tape to use on the feet and there are several combinations of products that make the feet more resistant to blisters. All of these must be tried before a hike.

The First Line of Blister Defense

There are several blister-reducing options that should be our first line of defense. The first goes without saying-**good proper fitting shoes or boots**. This is more important than anything else. Secondly, **do not go on a long hike with new boots that are not broken in!**

Proper socks are next. Moisture-wicking socks are available from almost every sock manufacturer, and given a choice, should always be picked before an all-cotton sock. We recommend two pair of socks or double-layer socks offer an inner layer that moves against the outer layer, reducing friction to the skin. Try several different types of socks of various weights and fabrics.

Lubricants are next on the list. Most hikers grew up using a lubricant, usually the age-old standby, Vaseline. Another favorite is Bag Balm, a salve with healing properties. Newer, state-of-the-art lubricants may contain silicone, pain-relieving benzocaine, or antifriction polymers. The trick with lubricants is to reapply them frequently, being sure to clean off the old layer before another application. Remember that lubricants and grit don't mix. The grit will quickly become an irritant, then a hot spot, and finally a blister. If your skin becomes too tender from the softening effects of the lubricant, then powders may be better for your feet.

Powders can help reduce friction by absorbing moisture. This reduces friction between the feet and the socks. Dry skin is more resistant to blister formation than skin that has been softened by moisture. Beware of powders that cake up and cause blisters. A good powder, like Zeasorb, will absorb many times its weight in moisture. Simple and readily available cornstarch also works.