

footprints

An informational newsletter for patients of APMA member podiatrists

Winter 2011-12

WINTER SPORTS INJURIES – ARE YOU PREPARED?

For many athletes and weekend exercise warriors, winter is a time to enhance their cardiovascular health. Many partake in winter sports such as sledding, skiing, snowboarding, rough-and-tumble ice hockey, or casual ice skating. Winter sports offer a fast track for fun, but expose the body to injuries, especially foot and ankle injuries.

Some common winter and snow sports injuries related to the foot and ankle include:

- *Frostbite* – The symptoms of frostbite include skin-color changes, from blue to whitish, and a feeling of burning or numbness;
- *Blisters* – Friction in winter sports footwear often causes blisters;
- *Neuromas* – Enlarged benign growths of nerves between the toes are caused by friction in tight footwear and can result in pain, burning, tingling, or numbness. Neuromas require professional treatment, including an evaluation of skates and boots, from a podiatric physician;
- *Sprains and strains* – The stress of skiing and skating can result in sprains and strains of the foot and ankle. They can be treated with rest, ice, compression, and elevation (RICE). If pain persists, seek medical attention from a podiatric physician; and
- *Subungual hematoma* – Pressure in the toe box of a ski or skate can cause bleeding under the toenail known as a subungual hematoma. This condition should be treated by a podiatric physician to prevent the loss of a toenail.

Podiatric physicians recommend properly fitted shoes or boots to prevent winter and snow injuries. With adequate preparation and proper equipment, you can prevent most injuries common to winter and snow sports.

- Maintain an adequate fitness level all year round. Being fit is the best way to avoid many sports-related injuries in winter.
- Find a buddy who enjoys your sport. Never participate in winter sports alone.
- Warm up thoroughly before activity. Cold muscles, tendons, and ligaments are vulnerable to injury. Make sure to cool down thoroughly afterwards, as well.

- Wear several layers of light, loose, water- and wind-resistant clothing for warmth and protection.
- Wear proper footwear that is in good condition and keeps feet warm and dry. Footwear should provide ample ankle support, as well.
- Wear appropriate protective gear, including goggles, helmets, gloves, and padding.
- Wear a blended sock that “wicks” sweat away from the skin. Consult your podiatric physician for recommendations.
- Drink plenty of water before, during, and after your sports activity.
- Move to a warm, dry environment if your feet get wet. The skin tissues of wet, cold feet are in danger of freezing (frostbite).



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Frostbite Can Take the Fun Out of Winter

As we enter the cold weather season, many of us will be skiing, sledding, and shoveling snow. Many people will get cold feet as well as wet feet. Having “Jack Frost nipping at your nose” sounds great when Nat King Cole sings it, but it’s no fun when frostbite strikes your feet.

Extreme exposure of your feet to cold over a prolonged period can lead to a serious condition called frostbite. However, you do not necessarily need to be exposed to extremely cold temperatures to get frostbite. Even cool temperatures coupled with wet socks can induce frostbite.

Symptoms include pain and a burning sensation in the exposed areas, numbness in the toes or feet, and changes in skin color, from pale or red to bluish-gray or black. Children, the elderly, and people with diabetes are more prone to frostbite because of the size of their extremities or poor circulation. People who live or work outdoors also have higher likelihood of contracting frostbite because of their increased exposure to the cold.

There are various degrees of frostbite with frost nip (first degree) being the most commonly encountered by people who live in very cold climates or do a lot of outdoor activity in the winter. Skin may feel stiff to the touch, but the tissue underneath is still warm and soft.

Superficial frostbite (second degree) and deep frostbite (third degree) are serious medical conditions that must be treated by a trained medical professional. Skin will feel hard and frozen to the touch and blistering will happen. In some severe cases, doctors may have to amputate frostbitten limbs to prevent severe infection.

Mild frostbite initially can be treated by getting out of the cold and moving to a warm environment. Keep the feet dry and warm; warm the skin gradually by using warm compresses or immersing the feet in warm water (101° to 104° F) until sensation returns. Do not use direct heat such as heating pads or fire, and do not disturb any blisters.

Frostbite is very serious, and if you suspect that you have it, seek professional help from a podiatric physician for any foot- and ankle-related concerns. Prompt diagnosis and proper treatment are essential; they can literally save your toes.

APMA Seal of Acceptance: Guide to Great Gifts this Season

The American Podiatric Medical Association’s (APMA) Seal of Acceptance/Approval Program recognizes products that have been found beneficial to foot health and of significant value when used in a consistently applied program of daily foot care and regular professional treatment. Below are gift choices recommended and approved by podiatric physicians.

- **TheraPED and TheraTOES**—Give the gift of pampering. Help stretch your achy and cramped feet and revitalize your toes. www.healthenterprises.com/foot-therapy
- **Adwill Labs’ Dr.’s Remedy Enriched Nail Polish**—Give the gift of nail polish that will promote more beautiful nails that look healthier and stronger. www.remedynails.com
- **O’Keefe’s Healthy Feet**—Another pampering gift. Remedy dry and cracked feet with this cream. It’ll soothe and revitalize the skin. www.okeeffescompany.com
- **Injinji’s Performance Series Toesocks**—For the athlete on your list, these anti-friction, contoured socks encourage healthy circulation and eliminate skin-on-skin contact between toes to prevent blisters. www.injinji.com
- **FitFlop’s**—For the entire family, these shoes/clogs and boots with an urban flair are the rage this season. FitFlop even has sandals for vacation or those living in warmer climates. www.fitflop.com



Doctors of podiatric medicine are podiatric physicians and surgeons, also known as podiatrists, qualified by their education, training, and experience to diagnose and treat conditions affecting the foot, ankle, and related structures of the leg.