

# Weekend Doctor

By DR. THOMAS F. VAIL

Don't forget to keep your feet in tip-top shape while following through with your resolutions to get fit.

Let me offer some tips for foot safety while at the gym.

- **Start new workouts gradually.**

Increase your stamina and the length of your workouts gradually to avoid overuse injuries such as stress fractures or tendon strains and sprains.

Stretching your muscles before and after workouts also helps prevent these types of injuries. If you do feel you've sprained your ankle, be sure to seek treatment right away.

Untreated or repeated ankle sprains may lead to chronic ankle instability, a condition that causes persistent pain and a "giving way" of the ankle.

- **Wear the right shoes and socks.**

Wear well-fitting athletic shoes designed for the exercise or sport.

Shoes that don't support the arch of the foot and provide cushion for the heel can cause heel pain, called plantar fasciitis.

Shoes that are too small can also cause a neuroma, or a thickening of the nerve tissue, in the foot and may require injections, medication or physical therapy.

Wearing cotton or non-slip socks are also key to help avoid painful blisters, which can become infected and cause more serious issues.

New fibers in socks such as copper and bamboo help to whisk away moisture and are naturally anti-microbial and anti-fungal.

The recently trapped Chilean coal miners were given copper socks to keep their feet dry and help protect against fungus.

- **Use good technique.**

Improper exercise techniques can result in injury to the tendons or ligaments in your feet and ankles.

Incorrect posture or misuse of exercise equipment can cause decreased stabilization in the foot and ankle, leading to joint sprains and muscle strains.

- **Protect yourself from bacteria.**

Sweaty shoes, public showers, exercise equipment and the pool deck at the gym are breeding grounds for fungus, viruses and bacteria, including drug-resistant strains like methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, which has become increasingly more common.

Never go barefoot while in public areas. Water shoes can provide a great barrier between your feet and the wet surfaces.

It's also best to cover cuts and cracks in the skin or ingrown toenails, since these minor tears in the skin's surface can act as entry points for bacteria.

If you have a cut or scrape that becomes red or swollen and is not healing in a timely manner, don't hesitate to see a foot and ankle surgeon for an examination.

Above all, it's important to listen to your body. If you experience an injury or pain, call your podiatrist for an evaluation.



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