



# Tropical Medical Bureau

## International Vaccination Centres

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footcare/TMB/5Sept2002



## Foot Care while Travelling

### Introduction:

Travelling brings significant stress and strain to your feet. Following some simple commonsense care before and while travelling will make a huge difference to your overall enjoyment and to your general health. You can divide the possible care of your feet into two associated areas - firstly stress & strain and secondly infection.

### Stress & Strain

Your feet are required to carry your entire body mass while walking. On many holidays there will be significant periods of moving about looking at monuments and ruins and visiting museums etc. Knowing that your feet will stay healthy is essential.

### Pre Departure Checkup

Generally this will only be necessary for the older traveller or those with a history of previous foot related problems. The foot specialist will be able to do any predeparture preparation to lessen your risks and also to advise on correct shoes etc.

### Corns and Blisters

Having a simple first-aid kit for your feet is important if you plan to walk a lot on your trip. The most common problems are associated with uneven pressure linked with poor quality and ill-fitting shoes. If you have a tendency towards corns and blisters spend time dealing with this before you travel.

### Varicose Veins and Travel

In those with varicose veins, poor venous circulation will increase the sense of heaviness and fatigue in your legs if you do a lot of walking. It also increases the risk of venous clotting during any long-haul flights. Support tights will be a wise precaution though wearing them in the heat and humidity may not be that pleasant.

### Walking with Flip-Flops

Walking long distances with 'flip-flops' may place significant stress and strain on your foot muscles leading to a very uncomfortable ache developing and therefore lessening your desire for the next days activities! Choose your shoes carefully and pack some corn plasters and some general plasters. Only plan to walk short distances in 'flip-flops'.

### Hill Walking and Trekking

If your holiday will involve a lot of walking over uneven ground consider purchasing a pair of walking boots which will also provide support for your ankles. Your feet need to 'breathe' to stay healthy so check the quality of the boots and remove them when possible to let the air circulate.

## Infections and your feet

### Mosquitoes and Smelly Feet

It is worth remembering that mosquitoes are attracted by the odour of perspiring feet. Strange animals! Various infections (including the so called 'athletes foot') are much more common in any part of your body where there is moist skin. This will occur most commonly between your toes but the axilla (armpit) and also below a female's breasts are other common areas. Washing off well and drying the region (plenty of talcum powder) will reduce the risk significantly. Allow your feet to be exposed to fresh air where possible.

### Athletes Foot & Verruca

This term is used because it is a common condition in those whose feet perspire. The white flaky skin typically starts between the toes and then spreads across the base of the foot. It is an itchy irritating fungal infection which is contagious and can be treated with powders and creams. Firstly though, reduce the amount of perspiration remaining in close contact with your feet as often as possible. Verruca are a viral infection and commonly passed on in communal bathing areas or showers. It is important to use flip-flops to protect against infection or to stop passing it on to others if you are infected yourself. The pain associated with walking on a verruca can be eased by using corn plasters to relieve the pressure.

### Creeping Larva Migrants

This is a parasitic infection which creeps across the skin. The disease occurs following contact with animal faeces - typically unseen but hidden on the beaches in many of the hotter tropical regions of the world. The animal hookworm gets under the human skin (typically on the feet) by mistake and then spends a few weeks trying to find the exit point as it weaves an uncomfortable and itchy path across just under the skin. The infection will not pass deeper into the body of the human but it is regularly misdiagnosed as a type of 'fungal infection' and often inappropriate treatment is given. We regularly see this condition in travellers returning from the beaches of Central America, the Caribbean islands and SE Asia. It also occurs in Africa. Wearing flip-flops or sandals and lying on towels lessens the risk.

### Jiggers and Chiggers

These rather unpleasant creatures infect the human and typically present as an 'ingrown toenail' infection. This is due to the eggs being laid just under the skin at the edge of the nail bed. It is important to ensure that sterile techniques are used to remove the creatures - especially by local practitioners. Infection can easily occur if you are not careful.

### Sea Urchins

Walking in the sea may lead you to stand on a sea urchin. The spines can easily pierce through your skin and are very painful. In many cases the locals will have a good form of poultice which will be helpful. However, be careful if they offer to remove the spines as the instruments they use may not be sterile.

### Sores and Bites

The sandfly tends to bite around the ankle and may infect the human with a parasite called Leishmaniasis. One version of this disease leads to an ulcerated skin lesion which looks like a mosquito bite. They tend to self-heal over many months and will usually leave a residual scar. Most commonly this will occur along the Mediterranean Coast line and in those climbing the Inca Trail in Peru.

### First Aid Kit for your Feet

- ❑ Sensible shoes - based on your planned itinerary
- ❑ Plasters and Corn Plasters
- ❑ Antibiotic and Antifungal Creams

### Further Information

The Tropical Medical Bureau was established in 1988 to care for the health of the International Traveller.

This leaflet has been prepared using information supplied from W.H.O. Center for Disease Control (US) and other International sources.

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