

# footprints

An informational newsletter for patients of APMA member podiatrists

Summer 2012

## THE “OUCH” FACTOR: What to Do about Splinters

The warm, sunny weather of summer is an invitation for us to shed our shoes and socks and run barefoot. However, running or walking (both inside and outside) barefoot places us at risk of splinters.

When you have a splinter in your foot, you will feel pain or discomfort and the sensation that something is embedded in the skin. Although wood splinters are most common, tiny bits of plastic, shards of metal or even broken glass can penetrate an unprotected foot.

While small splinters can be removed at home, any large or deep splinters in the foot should be removed by a podiatric physician. Anyone with diabetes should be especially vigilant, because a small splinter can grow quickly into a serious infection.

There are numerous home remedies that can help make removing splinters simple and fairly painless. Here are steps you can follow to safely remove a splinter from the foot:

1. Start by soaking the foot in warm water to soften the skin.
2. Wash your hands and gently clean the area of your foot in which the splinter is lodged.
3. Once the skin is soft, try to squeeze out the splinter by putting your fingers on either side of the splinter and pinching gently.
4. If the splinter won't come out by squeezing, disinfect a pair of tweezers and a needle with rubbing alcohol, iodine, or boiling water and let them dry. If the splinter is still sticking out of the skin, use the tweezers to grasp the end and pull gently but firmly.
5. You want to avoid breaking the splinter, which would leave the tail end in the skin. To remove the entire splinter, pull it out at the same

angle that it entered the body. Most splinters will come out easily.

6. If you can't grasp the splinter with the tweezers, use the very tip of a sterile needle to slightly open the skin where the splinter is lodged. Grasp the end of the splinter with the tweezers and pull firmly. **DO NOT** dig for the splinter.
7. **Disclaimer:** Use of a needle can assist with the removal of a splinter. However, use with caution to prevent further injury.
8. Remember to gently wash your foot once you're done.

Contact a podiatric physician if you're having trouble reaching the splinter, if you are making the wound worse, or if the area becomes red, swollen, or hot to the touch, either after you remove the splinter or you cannot see any foreign body under the skin. Whatever is embedded in your foot will determine how the podiatric physician will treat you. Deeply embedded foreign bodies may require a surgical procedure. Sometimes a local anesthetic is needed to completely remove a foreign body.

One good way to avoid splinters is to wear shoes both in the house and outside. There are many great options for summer besides bare feet, so keep feet healthy and happy by making good choices and avoiding splinters.

<sup>1</sup> J. Barron, "How to Safely Remove a Splinter from Your Feet," July 14, 2009, <http://www.prlog.org/10281942-how-to-safely-remove-splinter-from-your-foot.html> (accessed May 2, 2012)

## Is There a Rubbing Cream Designed to Relieve Foot Pain?

Foot pain may be relieved by selecting and wearing appropriate footwear or even receiving massage therapy that targets the feet. Sometimes traditional pain relievers (i.e., in pill form) will not work, and if you want another option to treat pain, topical medications may be for you.

Topical pain medications can be found in many forms such as balms, lotions, gels, creams, ointments, and patches. The benefit of topical medications is the ability to specifically target the area(s) of pain and treat it without any serious negative side effects.

The distinct types of topical medications fall into one of the following categories:

- **Salicylates** contain a chemical similar to aspirin and are designed to be absorbed into the skin to relieve pain. These creams are most commonly used for muscle soreness and aches. Common branded products include Ben Gay, Aspercreme, and Sportscreme.
- **Non-steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)** such as ibuprofen and naproxen fight pain associated with swelling. They are produced in

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## Is There a Rubbing Cream Designed to Relieve Foot Pain? *continued*

a gel or cream, like salicylates, and are designed to be absorbed into the skin. NSAIDs increase the body's anti-inflammatory response, reducing pain and heat for the injured area. They are available over-the-counter and in prescription form.

- **Analgesics** are useful in reducing pain in those suffering from mild arthritis. If your pain is focused in your ankle, for example, you might consider the brand name products Capzasin-P, Menthacin, and Zostrix. The cream or ointment works by stimulating and then decreasing the intensity of pain signals in the body.
- **Counterirritants** create a warm or cool sensation over a painful joint or sore muscle. Brand-name products include Icy Hot, JointFlex, and Flexall.
- **Anesthetics** are used to relieve "local pain" to a specific area by disabling the nerve endings in the skin. Brand-name anesthetic medications include Lanacane and Xylocaine.

Other topical medications include **anti-fungals** and **corticosteroids**. Anti-fungal topical medications come in various forms such as creams, powders, and sprays, and are used for treatment of athlete's foot. Some common brand

medicines are Lotrimin, Lamisil, and Desenex. See a podiatric physician if anti-fungal creams you've tried do not seem to work or if you have any other symptoms related to the infection, such as fever, rash, or sore throat.

Corticosteroids are most common topical treatment for psoriasis. They work by reducing inflammation and slowing the growth and build-up of skin cells. Applying topical creams on the infected areas will help soothe the itch and soften the hardened skin. If you have psoriasis on your feet, it is best to treat it as soon as possible to minimize the risk of spreading infection to your leg and even your toe nails. Consult with a podiatric physician immediately if you suspect you have psoriasis.

Topical pain medications are helpful in relieving the pain associated with foot problems but should never be used to "mask" pain. Consult a podiatric physician for suggestions and proper usage of topical medications.

<sup>1</sup> E. Quinn, "Topical Pain Medications-Sports Cream and Gels that Relieve Pain," April 18, 2012, [http://sportsmedicine.about.com/od/medicationanddrugs/a/sports\\_creams.htm](http://sportsmedicine.about.com/od/medicationanddrugs/a/sports_creams.htm) (accessed May 3, 2012)

## Why Do People Need Orthotics?

An orthotic is a device designed to restore your natural foot function. Many biomechanical (walking) complaints such as heel pain, knee pain, and lower back pain are caused by poor foot function. Orthotics re-align the foot and ankle bones to their neutral position, thereby restoring natural foot function.

A podiatric physician can prescribe orthotics—foot supports worn inside shoes—that are crafted for you and no one else; they match the contour of your feet precisely and are designed for the way you move. Only prescription orthotics can accommodate your unique foot structure. Podiatric physicians use orthotics to treat foot problems such as plantar fasciitis (heel pain); bursitis; tendinitis; diabetic foot ulcers; and foot, ankle, and knee pain.

If orthotics are needed, your podiatric physician will capture a three-dimensional image of each of your feet. That image, as well as any measurements obtained by your podiatric physician, is used to create a set of unique foot supports that will improve your foot movement and lead to more comfort and mobility.

There are two categories of prescription orthotics. Functional orthotics are designed to control abnormal motion and may be used to treat foot pain caused by abnormal motion; they can also be used to treat injuries such as shin splints or tendinitis. These are usually crafted from a semi-rigid material such as plastic or graphite. Accommodative orthotics are softer and meant to provide additional cushioning and support. They can be used to treat diabetic foot ulcers, painful calluses on the bottom of the foot, and other uncomfortable conditions.

If you have serious pain or discomfort, schedule an appointment with a podiatric physician. He or she will assess your overall health and look at any other contributing factors. Your podiatric physician can examine your feet and ankles, prescribe custom-made orthotics or, suggest additional treatments to improve the comfort and function of your feet.

## TAKE OUR TRUE/FALSE QUIZ TO LEARN THE TRUTH ABOUT ORTHOTICS.

**1. Orthotics have been proven to be highly successful when used properly and under the treatment of a podiatrist, a physician who specializes in the care of the feet and ankles.**

TRUE  FALSE

**2. Today's podiatrist is the most experienced medical professional to prescribe orthotics.**

TRUE  FALSE

**3. Orthotics are very expensive and don't last for a long period of time.**

TRUE  FALSE

### FAST FACTS:

- Orthotics can be created to fit a variety of different footwear including high heels.
- Every step places 1.5 times your body weight of pressure on each foot.
- Plantar fasciitis is the most common type of heel pain that podiatrists treat.
- Fifty-eight percent of Americans say they've experienced heel pain due to ill-fitting shoes.

- 1. TRUE.** Clinical research studies have shown that podiatrist-prescribed foot orthotics decrease foot pain and improve function.
- 2. TRUE.** Podiatrists are the only physicians who focus exclusively on the foot and ankle. They are uniquely qualified to diagnose and treat foot-related problems.
- 3. FALSE.** Orthotics typically cost more than insoles purchased in a retail store, but the additional cost is usually well worth it. Prescription orthotics are made of top-notch materials and last many years when cared for properly. Insurance often helps pay for prescription orthotics.

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.