

We'll Have Foot Fun in the Summer

By Roland Tolliver, DPM and Douglas Mason, DPM

Here it is May and we're still waiting for the warmth of spring to arrive and lead us into the fun and sun of summer -the time when we can walk barefoot along the beach or gather up the family and go out for a picnic or to the local pool. Kids will be out riding their bikes or skateboarding, while adults try to lose that winter 10 or 20 pounds that remind us of hibernating bears awaking from their slumber. We'll walk, jog, run, ride and try to regain the youthful vigor that our children or grandchildren display. What we often forget about, though, are the two things that have been hidden by shoes, boots and fuzzy slippers all winter, **our feet**.

Here are some ideas to keep in mind during the sunny summer months in order to maintain healthy feet:

- When applying sunscreen, don't forget your feet! The tops of your feet and your ankles are very susceptible to sunburn, especially around water or when sunbathing. If you go in the water, don't forget to reapply the sunscreen.
- Wash and dry your feet well when you get out of the water, especially between the toes. If there are any signs of open or cracked skin or if the skin on your feet itches, use a topical antifungal cream. Remember, clean and dry feet help them resist infections.
- Do not share towels. Athlete's feet can easily be spread from one person to another.
- Your toenails are vulnerable to infection if they remain damp and can be easily injured when one is not wearing shoes or is wearing open-toed sandals or flip-flops. It is very important to remind your children or grandchildren to wear shoes that cover their toes while riding bikes, skateboards or scooters. There is considerable danger of catching your toe in the spokes or scraping toes against the cement.
- Wear shoes that are activity specific. If you are playing tennis, wear tennis shoes. If you are walking or running, wear walking or running shoes. Wear good solid shoes when doing yard work. We'd rather not have to see toes or a foot that has been injured by a running lawnmower again, thank you.
- Allow enough time to break in new shoes. Don't buy a new pair and expect to walk five miles the next day. Your feet will suffer before the shoes are comfortable enough to walk any distance. Change socks frequently if your feet tend to sweat excessively or if you are walking through moist or wet areas.
- If you are wading in a lake or river it is best to wear water shoes to minimize your chance for cuts or other injuries. Same goes for any trips to the ocean. Jellyfish bites or coral cuts can be painful and potential sources of infection due to the open wounds.

- We highly recommend that you wear shoes when gardening. This helps to prevent foreign bodies from penetrating through the skin, like slivers or prickles. The area under the toenails is susceptible to pseudomonas infection, a bacteria that grows in the dirt. When people are kneeling with their bare feet in the dirt, they have a greater chance of developing this infection that causes the tissue beneath the nails to turn a greenish color. Fungal infections can also develop this way.
- Most importantly, have fun in the sun! Wear your sunscreen. Wear the appropriate shoes. And don't fall into the "too much, too soon" syndrome of trying to get in shape in one day. Go slow and steady. Walk, swim, ride your bike and you'll have a better chance of enjoying a pain-free summer.

Remember, if you are having pain that lasts for more than a few days, have any signs of infection to your feet, or injure your foot or ankle, contact your local podiatrist or health care provider. **Don't let something minor turn into something major.** You deserve to have an enjoyable summer - we want your feet to support you for many summers to come!