

# BACKPACKER'S FOOT CARE

## PREVENTION:

Some of the most important items of equipment that you take hiking are your feet. It is very important that you take the proper steps (before you ever put on your hiking boots) to take care of them. If you don't, at the end of the day they will let you know! Before heading out on the trail, make sure that you have:

- Cut your toenails. Cut them as close as possible and straight across. Leave a little bit of nail on the outside (the side that is not next to another toe) on you big toe to prevent ingrown toenails. Not only will keeping your toenails cut make your hike more comfortable, it will also keep your nails from putting holes in your hiking socks.
- Wear the right socks. The right socks will help to keep your feet dry and prevent friction, two very important factors in the battle against blisters. Together, your feet have approximately half a million (500,000) sweat glands capable of producing a cup of sweat each day. What can you do to make sure you take your feet hiking instead of swimming? Wear synthetic wool socks that will wick the moisture away from your feet. Avoid 100% cotton! Change your socks halfway through the hike, if necessary or take your boots off at lunch time to allow some of the moisture to evaporate. Synthetic liner socks made out of polypropylene or Cool Max also help wick moisture away from your feet, but more importantly, they prevent friction as your inner sock will slide against the outer sock, instead of your foot.
- Other tips. Make sure your bootlaces are tied firmly enough to prevent your heel from rubbing up-and-down in your boot. If you feel a "hot spot", put a little duct tape on that spot before it turns into a blister. Duct tape slides easily against your sock preventing friction. A little moleskin on that tender spot before the blister arrives also helps. If you have serious moisture problems with your feet try foot powder or putting antiperspirant on your feet.

## IF YOU GET A BLISTER:

Sometimes you just can't avoid getting a blister and so you need to deal with it. The following are some steps to take:

1. Clean the blister area with soap and water.
2. If the blister is not too swollen or painful, skip to Step 4. Otherwise, use a match flame to sterilize a pin or the tip of the sharpest blade on your pocketknife, and then carefully cut a small slit at the bottom of the blister to drain the fluid. Leave the skin flap in place to protect the wound and speed healing.
3. Apply antiseptic ointment or a small circle of a non-adhering sterile dressing directly on the blister.
4. Cut a doughnut-shaped piece of moleskin with a hole that's slightly larger than the blister. Place it over the blister and sterile dressing to create a pressure-free pocket for the sore. Cover the entire doughnut with a second piece of moleskin.
5. Secure the moleskin patch in place with medical tape. In a pinch, duct tape will do the job. For heel blisters, run tape strips along the sides of your foot toward the toes, then secure the ends with a few loops run around the instep.
6. Promote healing by keeping the blister moist with ointment or sterile dressing.