

WINTER FEET

The Holidays are over, but most regions of the country face a few more months of winter. Whether you're slogging through deep snow and sub-zero temperatures in the north, or contending with dampness, chill, and muddy conditions in the south, it's important to take care of your feet all winter long. You'll want them to be healthy and ready for action when spring finally arrives!

Winter is skiing and snowboarding season, activities enjoyed by nearly 10 million Americans, according to the National Ski Areas Association. Never ski or snowboard in footwear other than ski boots specifically designed for that purpose. Make sure your boots fit properly; you should be able to wiggle your toes, but the boots should immobilize the heel, instep, and ball of your foot. You can use orthotics (support devices that go inside shoes) to help control the foot's movement inside ski boots or ice skates.

Committed runners don't need to let the cold stop them. A variety of warm, lightweight, moisture-wicking active wear available at most running or sporting goods stores helps ensure runners stay warm and dry in bitter temperatures. However, some runners may compensate for icy conditions by altering how their foot strikes the ground. Instead of changing your foot strike pattern, shorten your stride to help maintain stability. And remember, it's more important than ever to stretch before you begin your run. Cold weather can make you less flexible in winter than you are in summer, so it's important to warm muscles up before running.

Boots are must-have footwear in winter climates, especially when dealing with winter precipitation. Between the waterproof material of the boots themselves and the warm socks you wear to keep toes toasty, you may find your feet sweat a lot. Damp, sweaty feet can chill more easily and are more prone to bacterial infections. To keep feet clean and dry, consider using foot powder inside socks and incorporating extra foot baths into your foot care regimen this winter.

Be size smart. It may be tempting to buy pricey specialty footwear (like winter boots or ski boots) for kids in a slightly larger size, thinking they'll be able to get two seasons of wear out of them. But unlike coats that kids can grow into, footwear needs to fit properly right away. Properly fitted skates and boots can help prevent blisters, chafing, and ankle or foot injuries. Likewise, if socks are too small, they can force toes to bunch together, and that friction can cause painful blisters or corns.

Finally—and although this one seems like it should go without saying, it bears spelling out—don't try to tip-toe through winter snow, ice, and temperatures in summer-appropriate footwear. "More than one news show across the country aired images of people in sneakers, sandals, and even flip-flops during the severe cold snap that hit the country in early January. Exposing feet to extreme temperatures means risking frostbite and injury. Choose winter footwear that will keep your feet warm, dry and well-supported."

TLC for Winter Feet:

Raise, point, and curl your toes for five seconds on each foot. Repeat 10 times. Rotate your ankles to relax your feet. Cup your heel and rotate each ankle slowly five times to help loosen ankle joints.

Massage your feet; it releases tension, promotes circulation, and rejuvenates the skin after a long day of walking and standing. Add your favorite scented lotion into the mix for a soothing, relaxing experience.

Elevate your legs. If you're prone to swollen ankles or calves and you sit a lot at work, elevate your legs with a foot stool under your desk. At the end of the day, reduce swelling by lying down and lifting your legs above your heart.

Winter Weather Especially Harsh For Those With Diabetes:

For people with health issues like diabetes, foot health is especially important when the weather turns cold, as the disease can affect your body's circulation even more so during the winter months. People with diabetes should keep these tips in mind:

You probably wouldn't dream of going barefoot outside in the winter, but you shouldn't do it inside, either. Always wear shoes and socks when walking outside, and at least wear socks inside. They afford a needed layer of warmth and protection.

Stay active. Physical activity aids circulation, which is critical for people with diabetes. Don't let the cold weather be your excuse for becoming—or staying—sedentary. Get regular exercise, and don't be afraid to do it outdoors. Just remember to properly protect your feet from moisture and cold while you're outside.

Wash and inspect your feet daily. Perform your self-exam at the same time every day and watch for changes in skin color, sores, swelling, blisters, peeling, cracking, or other signs of a problem. When you have diabetes, even a minor wound can become a problem, so don't wait to see a podiatrist if you develop an injury that's not healing.

For further information about foot or ankle conditions, contact one of our foot and ankle surgeons at the Reconstructive Foot & Ankle Institute, LLC. Visit us on the web at www.rfainstitute.com or make an appointment with one of our state of the art offices in Maryland:

Hagerstown [301.797.8554](tel:301.797.8554), 1150 Professional Court, Suite C, 21740

Frederick [301.418.6014](tel:301.418.6014), 2100 Old Farm Drive, Suite D, 21702

To make an appointment at our Frederick office, please call [301.418.6014](tel:301.418.6014). 2100 Old Farm Drive Ste. D, Frederick, MD 21702

To make an appointment at our Hagerstown office, please call [301.797.8554](tel:301.797.8554). 1150 Professional Court, Suite C, Hagerstown, MD 21740

Most insurance accepted but not required.

We look forward to solving your foot and ankle problems with Comprehensive Foot and Ankle Care® and treating you like a member of the family.

Very truly yours,

Daniel D. Michaels, DPM, MS & Associates