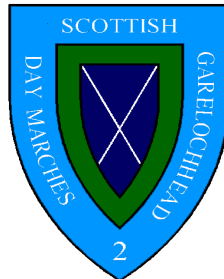


Scottish Garelochhead 2 Day Marches 2008



Some simple advice on marching related healthcare...

When it comes to long distance walking & road marching, everyone claims to be an expert. But bear in mind, it is also said that "any fool can be uncomfortable", so please take a few minutes to read this advice.

When marching, footwear is a very individual preference, but many experienced marchers will agree that wearing 2 pairs of socks, 1 pair made of thin cotton (turned inside out to prevent seams causing friction) and a heavier pair, reduce the risk of blister formation. However, many other marchers will only wear one pair of socks. You will need to train well in advance and decide what your personal choice is. No matter what you finally decide, your socks will need to be changed frequently over the route. When it comes to boot choice, boots need to be light and breathable. A common preference is Magnum Hi-Tec Classics. Again, like socks there are a range of several other similar types for you to choose from. Very importantly you must 'break them in' well in advance.

No matter how hard we try to prevent blisters, some people are more prone to getting them than others. This is when the careful application of something such as Compeed can reduce the pain levels, so that routes can be completed in reasonable comfort. Compeed must be pre heated by body heat to ensure optimum application. If you are unsure how to treat a blister ask someone who knows. More pain can be caused by wrongly treating blisters. They should not be cut, but aspirated where appropriate. It is important that you always insert any hypodermic needle from the side of the blister, as any other approach may lead to further pain and damage if the needle is inserted too far.

Other common mistakes are over taping with Zinc Oxide tape or to cover feet excessively in powder. All this does is increase friction or clog pores which means that the feet are unable to breathe properly. If used, powder must be applied sparingly.

Here are some other common foot conditions and their treatment ...

Calluses

Calluses are mounds of yellow hard skin that can form anywhere the skin rubs against the bone, shoe or ground. They are usually found on the ball of the foot, on the toes or around the side and back of the heel. Callus is just dead skin and doesn't actually cause any harm itself. However, the thickened skin may put pressure on the nerves, causing a dull burning sensation.

Corns

Corns appear in many different types. The more common are referred to as 'hard corns'. These are small shiny lumps which are usually found on the tops of toes, the outside of the little toe or on the soles of the feet. You can also get 'soft corns' that are whitish or rubbery in texture and are often found between the toes where the skin is moist from perspiration or inadequate drying.

They are caused in a similar way to calluses. At the point where there is more pressure, a corn may form, which presses on the nerve endings in the foot. This can be very painful.

How to treat...

If the callus is not too thick it can be simply reduced using a pumice stone. Foot moisturiser can also be applied which will make the skin more supple and may help prevent calluses.

Bunions

Bunions are very common and affect the big toe joint. Pressure on the side of the big toe gradually pushes it out of line so that it bends towards the other toes. The skin over the joint will often appear red and inflamed. Left untreated a bunion may eventually develop a protective sac of fluid called a bursa. Bunions can be exacerbated by badly fitting shoes, though the tendency to develop this condition may be hereditary.

How to treat...

Wearing comfortable shoes that fit without rubbing or squeezing are essential. High heels also put additional pressure on the foot which may make the condition worse. You can protect the area from further by using special foam padding.

Hard, Dry, Rough Skin

Rough, hard skin on the feet may not be painful but is unattractive. However, hard skin often follows the contours of the feet and this may eventually cause cracks where the skin is flexed. This can become sore or infected.

How to treat...

Keep your skin soft and flexible which will help prevent the build up of dry skin. Massage your feet daily using a deep moisturising cream. Where existing dead skin is particularly thick, use a foot file of pumice stone.

Verrucas

Verrucas are troublesome, sometimes painful in-growing warts that caused by a virus. They are often found in groups on the sole of the foot or on the toes and usually have a tiny black spot in the centre. Although the verruca itself is not painful, but as it grows the pressure it puts on the nerves on the foot become very irritating.

How to treat...

Treatment is only necessary if the verruca is painful. If left, they will eventually disappear without any form of treatment (especially on children).

Athlete's Foot

Unfortunately you don't have to be an athlete to catch this contagious fungal infection. The first signs are often flaky, white skin usually found around the toes, but it can affect all areas of the foot. If left untreated, the skin becomes soggy and sometimes quite painful and itchy.

How to treat...

Fortunately this condition responds well to treatment, but a thorough treatment regime must be followed to get rid of it completely. Most anti-fungal preparations need to be continued to be used for at least two weeks after the infection has cleared. Special foot powders and sprays for use in shoes, socks and on the feet reduce the risk of spreading it.

In-growing Toenail

An in-growing toenail is usually the result of cutting nails too short and rounding the corners rather than cutting the nails straight across. Sometimes if the nail is very curved, the sides of the nail will grow into the surrounding skin. Whatever the cause, the initial discomfort of a toenail pressing onto the skin can soon become inflamed and very painful.

How to treat...

Don't leave it and 'wait and see', and don't attempt to dig out the toenail yourself as this can often lead to infection. Trim the nails straight across.

Thickened Toenails

Thickened toenails can develop following an injury, for example, after a heavy object on the toe or the nails are allowed to grow too long and are consistently pressing against the end of the shoe. This can damage the root matrix of the nail which may be damaged irreversibly.

How to treat...

Visit a chiropodist who will be able to cut and thin down the nails quite painlessly. Once this has been done, the thickening process can be slowed down using an emery board.

Chilblains

If you have itchy, small and red swellings on your skin around your toes, there is a good chance that you may have chilblains. These are associated with the exposure to the cold and should be prevented by ensuring that toes and fingers are not exposed to extreme temperatures.

How to treat...

Try not to scratch the affected area as this may cause infection. Using Witch Hazel or Calamine lotion will ease the irritation. Apply an antiseptic dressing on any broken skin. To help prevent chilblains in the first place, wear two pairs of thin socks and shoes/boots that will keep your feet warm in cold weather. If your feet are cold, it is important to warm them slowly. A daily foot massage will also help with circulation.

Foot care aside, the most important information that I can give you is to drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids on route. Water is best, as fizzy drinks can make you feel nauseated while marching. There are plenty of opportunities to re-fill water bottles/hydration sacs. Don't overdo alcohol consumption before marching either, as this will also increase the risk of dehydration.

Finally, don't forget to wear sensible underwear. Cotton should be worn as opposed to nylon as it allows more breathability. Sports varieties are said to be the most comfortable. An application of Vaseline to the inner thighs can prevent uncomfortable friction.

If you are still unsure of what to do...ask a medic!!! Or e-mail dpc20@msn.com