

Don't Let Your Feet Ruin Your Day at the Beach

By Aaron Shemenski, DPM, Podiatric Surgeon

Millions of Americans will hit the beach this summer to enjoy the sun and sand – but with all of the fun there is to enjoy, it's unlikely they'll be thinking about the damage it can cause to their feet.

There are a variety of common foot injuries and conditions that affect individuals of all ages – many being even more prevalent in the summer months. Here are some recommended safety tips to help your feet beat the summer heat:

Puncture Wounds and Cuts

Wear shoes to protect your feet from puncture wounds and cuts caused by sea shells, broken glass and other sharp objects. Don't go in the water if your skin gets cut – bacteria in oceans and lakes can cause infection. To avoid complications from a puncture wound, see a foot and ankle specialist for treatment within 24 hours.

Jellyfish Stings

Remember that a jellyfish washed up on the beach can still sting if you step on it. If their tentacles stick to the foot or ankle, remove them, but protect your hands from getting stung too. Vinegar, meat tenderizer or baking soda reduces pain and swelling. Most jellyfish stings heal within days, but if they don't, medical treatment is required.

Sunburns

Feet get sunburned too. Rare but deadly skin cancers can occur on the foot. Don't forget to apply sunscreen to the tops and bottoms of your feet.

Burns

Sand, sidewalks and paved surfaces get hot in the summer sun. Wear shoes to protect your soles from getting burned, especially if you have diabetes.

Ankle Injuries, Arch and Heel Pain

Walking, jogging and playing sports on soft, uneven surfaces like sand frequently leads to arch pain, heel pain, ankle sprains and other injuries. Athletic shoes provide the heel cushioning and arch support that flip-flops and sandals lack. If injuries occur, use rest, ice, compression, and elevation to ease pain and swelling. Any injury that does not resolve within a few days should be examined by a foot and ankle surgeon.

Diabetes Risks

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The 20 million Americans with diabetes face serious foot safety risks at the beach. Diabetes causes poor blood circulation and numbness in the feet. A diabetic may not feel pain from a cut, puncture wound or burn. Any type of skin break on a diabetic foot has the potential to get infected and ulcerate if it isn't noticed right away. Diabetics should always wear shoes to the beach, and remove them regularly to check for foreign objects like sand and shells that can cause sores, ulcers and infections.

For more helpful tips on common foot and ankle health topics, visit the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons' consumer website: FootHealthFacts.org.

Dr. Shemenski is a podiatric surgeon affiliated with Morton Hospital and its Center for Wound Healing. To learn more or make an appointment, call Steward DoctorFinder at 800-488-5959.