

## Proper Preparation Helps Avoid Hiking Injuries

(NAPSA)—Hiking can be vigorous exercise and many hikers and hunters are ill prepared for the beating their feet will take, warns the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons (ACFAS).

“Hikers, hunters and others who love the outdoors often don’t realize how strenuous it can be to withstand constant, vigorous walking on uneven terrain,” said Michael Cosenza, DPM, AACFAS, a former Navy medical officer and now a foot and ankle surgeon based in Ukiah, Calif. An avid outdoorsman himself, Cosenza said lax physical conditioning and inappropriate footwear bring scores of outdoor enthusiasts to his office for treatment of foot and ankle problems such as heel pain, ankle sprains, Achilles tendonitis, fungal infections and severe blisters.

“Walking up and down steep hillsides and tramping through wet, slippery fields and wooded areas puts stress on the muscles and tendons in the feet and ankles, especially if you haven’t conditioned properly before hitting the trail,” said Cosenza. “Also, many don’t realize that cross-training shoes aren’t the best choice for extended hiking and hunting. Had some of my patients worn sturdy, well constructed hiking boots, they wouldn’t have suffered sprained ankles or strained Achilles tendons.”

Cosenza advises hikers and hunters to invest in top-quality hiking boots. He said strong, well insulated and moisture-proof boots with steel or graphite shanks offer excellent ankle and foot support that lessens stress and muscle fatigue to reduce injury risk.

In wet and cold weather, wearing the right socks can help prevent blisters, fungal infections and frostbite. Cosenza recommends synthetic socks as the first



layer to keep the feet dry and reduce blister-causing friction. For the second layer, wool socks add warmth, absorb moisture and help make the hiking boot more comfortable.

What happens if your feet or ankles hurt during a hike or hunt? According to the ACFAS consumer Web site, FootPhysicians.com, pain is a warning sign that something is wrong. “Serious injury risk escalates significantly if you continue hiking in pain,” Cosenza said. He likened hiking to skiing in that beginners should take on less difficult trails until they become better conditioned and more confident.

Cosenza also recommends visiting a foot and ankle surgeon if there is persistent foot or ankle pain after a hiking or hunting outing. “I’m most concerned about ankle instability and strained Achilles tendons. Inattention to these problems at their early stages may lead to a serious injury that will keep you off the trails a long time,” Cosenza said.

Hikers and hunters seeking further information about ankle sprains, Achilles tendon injuries and other foot and ankle problems or looking for a foot and ankle surgeon, can visit [www.FootPhysicians.com](http://www.FootPhysicians.com).