

# Take steps to protect your feet this winter

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Getting around in winter works best if you're taking good care of the feet that take you places.

Orthopedic specialists at the Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS) in New York City say they often see an uptick in avoidable injuries and foot problems during the winter.

They offered some tips for winterizing your feet.

First, make sure your winter shoes and boots still fit.

"Our feet change as we get older, and footwear that fit us last year may now be too tight," said Dr. Mark Drakos, an orthopedic foot and ankle surgeon at HSS Long Island and the main hospital in Manhattan.

"Squeezing your feet into shoes that are too snug can lead to foot pain, blisters, bruises and other problems."

Drakos recommends shopping for new shoes and boots in the late afternoon or evening because feet get larger throughout the day. Take along the socks you plan to wear in cold weather. Thicker socks require more room.

Don't forget good traction, which can help keep you on your feet on snowy or icy ground.

"It may seem like common sense, but the first winter storm of the season often catches people off guard, and we tend to see more injuries," said Dr. Andrew Elliott, an orthopedic foot and ankle surgeon at HSS in Manhattan and Paramus, N.J.

Elliott recommends keeping a spare pair of winter shoes at work in case of unexpected snow. Anti-slip [shoe](#) covers can also provide traction on slick surfaces. They're easy to find online.

Footcare is important, too, the experts noted in an HSS news release.

Moisturize your feet daily if you're prone to dry, cracked heels or similar issues.

Ward off fungus and infections such as athlete's foot by keeping your feet dry. Acrylic-blend socks that wick away moisture can help with that.

Change socks after exercising, engaging in winter activities or at the end of the day. Dry any wet shoes and socks overnight, Elliott said.

Exposure to cold air can cause the body to slow blood circulation to the extremities. To prevent frostbite, make sure you're wearing water-resistant, insulated footwear and warm socks if you're out in the cold, the doctors urged.

If you start to experience numbness or pain, go to a warmer environment as soon as possible. People with diabetes are at particular risk because [nerve damage](#) known as neuropathy may prevent them from feeling the cold, Elliott said.

Before hitting the slopes, do some [strength training](#) and conditioning to get your body ready, said Dr. James Wyss, a physiatrist at HSS Long Island who treats patients with sports injuries and other painful conditions.

"Everyone should also take the time to warm up before an athletic activity," he said. "This is essential to prevent injury."

Wyss suggests a 10-minute warmup that targets the muscles that will be used that day. Someone who is hiking or snowshoeing might do brisk walking on a level surface or climb a couple of flights of stairs.

Wearing a shoe with good traction is important if you run year-round, added Dr. Tony Wanich, an orthopedic surgeon at the HSS Sports

Medicine Institute in Manhattan. A specialized shoe store can help you make the right choice.

"Much like the way we change our tires to deal with [winter](#) weather, we advise runners to wear the appropriate shoes for the season," Wanich said.

He also recommends wearing insulated socks in very [cold weather](#) to avoid mild frostbite. Awareness of dropping temperatures is critical to staying safe.

Stop if you experience pain during an activity and take a break, the doctors advised. See a doctor sooner rather than later if you have foot pain that isn't improving.

**More information:** The U.S. National Library of Medicine has more on [foot injuries and disorders](#).

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