

2018 Perth Oxfam Trailwalker Foot Survival Guide

Presented by



About Dr Ned Buckley

As a Specialist Podiatric Surgeon and Podiatrist, Dr Buckley is proud to once again be the head volunteer Podiatrist for this year's event. Drawing on both his podiatric clinical knowledge and first-hand experience from the past five year's events, Ned has put together this guide to share his expert advice on footcare, shoe and sock selection, and blister management to help you complete the walk with as little pain and problems as possible.

During the two day event on 5-7 October, Ned and a team of volunteer podiatrists and students will be stationed at checkpoints to provide first aid, including treatment, blister management, strapping, ankle sprains, bruising etc.

In the lead up to the event, Ned will also be providing two foot care and blister management information sessions at Paddy Pallin on 31st May and 1 August. For more information, visit <https://trailwalker.oxfam.org.au/perth/>.

If you want to give yourself the best chance of your feet lasting the distance, you can make an appointment with Ned ahead of the event and he will conduct a full examination, biomechanical assessment and footwear analysis to identify any areas which may cause you problems. He can also craft you a pair of custom orthotics at his West Perth clinic to support and cushion your feet, help to prevent blisters and chaffing and to address any biomechanical issues you may have.

In the spirit of this worthy fundraising event, Ned Buckley Podiatry will pledge \$30 to each Oxfam team member who is prescribed a pair of custom orthotics from Ned Buckley Podiatry before the 4 October 2018. We will also pledge \$10 for each Initial Consultation with a Trailwalker participant before the event.



Footwear

Your footwear will be your most important piece of equipment during the event. Selecting a quality pair of comfortable shoes and socks is critical.

Here are the key points to keep in mind when selecting a walking shoe:

- Your shoes should fit comfortably from the start. It comes down to personal preference as to whether you want to wear one shoe type over the other. If you plan to walk you should probably look at a walking shoe, or hiking shoe.
- Fit is important. Have someone knowledgeable guide you into the right shoes for your needs. Go to a reputable shop with experienced shoe fitters.
- If you feel that your ankles might be unstable or you have a history of rolling your ankles to the point of injury, consider something that comes up a little higher around the ankles for extra support.
- The shoes should be designed for the type of terrain that you plan to walk or run on.
- Running shoes generally don't have the right kind of tread to give you grip on the surfaces that you will walk or run over on a bush trail. If you plan to jog, or run, then trail shoes are recommended. They have the right kind of tread for the loose gravel and varied terrain and they are designed for running.
- Your shoes should already be somewhat worn-in before the event. You should organise your shoes now if you haven't already done so. Different brands and models will wear out at different speeds and in different places, so ask the shoe fitter how long they are supposed to last - you don't want a shoe that is going to fall apart during the event.
- Have a backup pair of shoes on hand. It is OK if it is a different shoe type, as this will also help rest different parts of your feet. Some people might choose to walk different parts of the trail in different shoes. Find out a bit about the varying terrain so you know what you are in for. Consider having one pair of shoes that are waterproof, just in case in rains.
- Get the right shoe for your foot type: Shoe manufacturers make shoes for specific foot types. As a general rule, if you have a rolling in or pronating foot type, shoes with medial support and a wider and straighter last are probably going to be better. If you roll out and have what we call a supinating foot type then you need to ensure that the shoes have enough lateral support, particularly along the edge of the midsole and outsole to help prevent ankle sprains.
- If you feel that you have a particular problem related to footwear choice, see your podiatrist.



The Five Point Test for a Walking Shoe

- ☑ They should bend at the big toe joint level.
- ☑ The heel counter needs to be firm: you should not be able to easily compress the back of the shoe with your thumb.
- ☑ Your shoes need to have structural support; you should not be able to wring them like a towel.
- ☑ The shoes need to be wide enough to accommodate the width of your forefoot - not too tight or loose.
- ☑ Your toes should not hit the end of the shoe, especially when walking downhill. Anywhere from 1 cm to 1.5 cm is OK for toe room at the front. You need to check this in the shop.

Here is what you need to know about socks:

- Socks are very important: Make sure that the socks are made from materials that have moisture wicking properties. There are various products out there and they can be made from either natural or synthetic fibers. My choice would be a wool blend sock, with elastic properties.
- **100% cotton socks will cause you problems.** Cotton does not wick moisture that well and so your feet will get wet and you will rub and blister.
- Make sure that the socks are the **correct size and fit** for your foot. **No wrinkles!!**
- With socks, thicker is not always better. A medium to light weight sock will minimize overheating and not crowd your feet in the shoe.
- If you think that blistering or sweating is going to be a problem, then you could try a sock liner; this is a personal choice and not for everyone. Make sure the sock liner is wicking and that it fits snugly around all the contours of your feet.
- Toe socks may be beneficial for those who experience rubbing and blistering between the toes.



Preparation and Foot Health

Preparation and training before the event is not just about building fitness. You also need to condition your feet and rectify any existing problems.

Here is how you can prepare your feet before the event:

- Make sure that you have been training on similar surfaces and types of terrain as to those you will encounter during the event. Don't just train on hard surfaces like the road or pavement, as you are unlikely to adequately prepare for the trail walk.
- You might initially experience sore feet when you begin to cover more distance in your training. If you are experiencing ongoing problems with your feet, ankles or lower legs during training, then consider seeing a podiatrist for an evaluation.
- People often develop hard skin on the bottom of their feet called calluses. This is the body's natural way to protect the underlying tissues, however, excessive calluses and corns, (corns grow inwards), need to be reduced, as they tend to be pressure points that can develop blisters. This is something you can see a podiatrist about.
- Make sure you keep your nails neatly trimmed and if you have any problems with ingrown nails, make sure that you are treated for this in enough time before the event.
- If you are already seeing a physiotherapist, sports physician or exercise physiologist about any training related problems, ask about the possible need to have your feet checked as your feet can contribute to many problems, particularly if you are having knee and/or lower limb problems.
- If you think **supportive or corrective innersoles or orthotics** might help in your shoes, consult a podiatrist: there are many products out there and some are appropriate, and some aren't. If you already have orthotics and they are not working for you, return to your podiatrist with your problem or get a second opinion, as your orthotics should not be painful. Custom made orthotics can be made specifically for certain foot problems, and for specific shoes. If your podiatrist had your everyday work shoes in mind for the design of your orthotics, then chances are they will not work so well in your shoes for this event.
- If you injure yourself or are worried about what feels like developing problems during training, it is important that you take the right steps to treat this before it becomes a chronic problem. Podiatrists are very good at identifying these types of problems and providing appropriate treatment.
- Keep your feet clean during the walk; change to fresh, clean socks and wash and dry your feet whenever you get the chance.



Blister prevention

Fatigue and muscle tiredness might slow you down, but painful blisters can stop you in your tracks.

Here is how you can avoid blisters:

- Have correctly fitting shoes that are worn-in and appropriate socks. Don't wear 100% cotton socks.
- Keep your feet clean and dry. Have a few pairs of socks or sock liners on hand and change your socks regularly to keep your feet dry.
- Custom orthotics help maintain the foot in a functionally neutral position and help to prevent pressure points.
- Make sure your existing orthotics or innersoles are not going to be a source of friction: some innersoles are made from abrasive materials not suited to hiking long distances. Innersoles can be specially made to fit correctly in your shoes and covered with materials that can help reduce the risk of blisters. Examples of these kinds of materials are Spenco (a neoprene type cover), Poron, Soft EVA and Plastezote.
- Tip any dirt, sand or pebbles straight out; don't wait. If you can feel something inside your shoe, chances are that if you leave it, you will develop a blister. Wearing gaiters can prevent foreign objects getting into your shoes.
- Take regular breaks and check your feet for "hot spots". Hot spots may be identified as red marks or sore spots on your skin that will eventually blister if not treated. You might only notice these while you are resting, so check your feet when you are having a break. They are often close to bony prominences like your big toe joint or back of the heel.
- Maintaining proper hydration helps reduce swelling of the feet, so the occurrence of hot spots and blisters is reduced. When you become fluid-deficient, the skin loses its normal levels of water in the skin and easily rubs or folds over on itself, leading to blisters.
- Some people benefit from taping the feet in areas that are prone to blisters. This can be done by a podiatrist the day before the event.
- There are many different theories and products out there that claim to prevent blisters such as lubricants, powders, blister pads and antiperspirants. Unfortunately there isn't one perfect solution that is going to suit everyone. Experiment with different products and methods during your training to see what works best for you.
- If you are constantly getting bad blisters when you are training and this is not getting better with time, then have your shoes, socks and innersoles reviewed, they might be inappropriate.

Blister treatment

In the event you do develop blisters, you must treat them immediately before they become a big problem.

Here is how you should treat blisters:

- Treat any hot spots immediately: You can use Fixomull or Hyperfix with or without sports tape over the top. You can also use moleskin or a combination preparation such as Second skin with overlying moleskin (spenco). A little bit of Friar's Balsam (Benzoin tincture) rubbed over the area will help the dressing to stick.
- Have a blister pack made up and ready that has products for both treatment and prevention of blisters. There are no fast rules; figure out which products work best for you.
 - **A basic prevention pack** might contain the following: A small roll of Fixomull tape, some Moleskin patches, some second skin patches or a pre-made blister pack. A small container of Friars Balsam with cotton tips as applicators. A small roll of Sports tape.
 - **A Basic blister treatment pack** might contain the following: A small bottle of hand sanitizer, a couple pairs of gloves, scissors, antiseptic skin wipes, non-adherent dressings (such as Allevyn Thin or Melonin), a small bottle of antiseptic liquid for wounds such as Betadine, cotton tipped applicators, a sterile needle, gauze, Fixomull tape and a small roll of sports tape.
- If you develop a fluid-filled blister, it is best to gently pierce the blister with a sterile needle, massage the fluid out and then dress the wound.

Important things to remember when treating a blister

- Be sure to thoroughly clean your hands and your foot before breaking the blister to avoid infection.
- Make sure that you round the edges of any tapes that you apply. This will prevent balling up of the tape in the sock.
- The idea is to reduce friction: You may want to try a "donut" pad around a blister or hot spot using moleskin.
- Always dress a wound by fully covering it. Get it treated at the checkpoints.

Treating foot problems

If foot trouble strikes, podiatrists will be on hand at various checkpoints to provide first aid.

Here is what you should do if you experience an injury:

- There will be podiatrists and podiatry students on hand to help you with any problems at various checkpoints. Make sure you get yourself checked out at the checkpoint if you have had to stop for an injury or were feeling unwell during a stage.
- **Blisters, cuts and skin breaks:** Use the contents of your premade Blister Pack and first aid kit. Make sure that you know the contents of these and what each item is used for as this will save time and help avoid complications. Infections are a risk and so make sure you use antiseptics appropriately and sanitize your hands before treating a wound.
- **For minor foot, ankle or calf strain injuries:** If it is difficult to walk without pain: Rest, compress, elevate and seek help, use ice as well if available. If you feel that the injury is minor and you can walk without pain, you might try taping the area for support and compression to get you through to the next checkpoint where you need to seek help.



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