

## Integrated Approach to Selecting Padded Socks and Shoes that Fit

**H**ow often have you bought a new pair of shoes, sneakers or boots only to discover that after a day or two of wear, you have rubbing, chafing, blisters and/or pain in your toes, on a bunion, or in the heel? You've already worn your new footwear, and most stores won't do a return or store credit. You then embark on a quest for inserts, gel pads or just plain band aids. Maybe you think about padded socks—but by then, it's usually too late; even padded socks that might otherwise protect your feet may not fit if you try them on after you've already bought your footwear.

To help avoid these common scenarios and provide optimal protection for the skin/soft tissues of your feet, IPFH recommends following an integrated approach when purchasing footwear.

Follow this process when shopping for footwear at self-service shoe stores; or if you shop at a store that has fitters or clerks to assist you, use it to help them help you get proper footwear and a proper fit.

First, select padded socks that are made for the specific activity in which you will be involved—for example, padded socks made for walking, running or hiking. Be aware that some padded socks made of acrylic or acrylic-blend fibers have been demonstrated by scientific research to reduce impact, pressure and shear forces. They also move (“wick”) moisture away from the foot, making it less vulnerable to fungal infection, irritation and other skin damage. Peer-reviewed, published studies have shown that wearing clinically tested padded socks can help protect against injuries to the skin/soft tissue of the foot.

Next, select shoes with non-slip outsoles that fit properly so that your foot can't move around in the shoe and become irritated. The shoes, like your padded socks, also should be made for the specific activity you will engage in. Properly designed and

fitted shoes or boots have uppers made of mesh or another material that wicks away moisture while not allowing it in. If the shoe upper is made of leather, it should have vents or other openings that help evacuate moisture. Be aware that waterproof shoes do not wick away moisture and may create a wet environment conducive to the growth of athlete's foot or another foot fungus. Well-designed footwear also has few seams or raised areas that can cause pressure points or rub the skin, and should be shaped like your feet (no pointy toes).



Do you wear inserts or orthotics? If so, be sure to bring them with you when you go shopping for new footwear.

Now you are ready to buy your footwear. Put on your padded socks and place any inserts or orthotics in the shoes you're considering buying. Is there enough room in the toe box to comfortably wiggle your toes? Walk around in the store for several minutes. Mimic any movements you might normally make when you participate in a specific sport or activity. Make sure you don't feel any rubbing, pinching or chafing. Don't buy shoes that don't feel comfortable in the hope that they'll feel better when you “break them in.”

The bottom line: Your padded socks, shoes and any inserts or orthotics should feel comfortable from the very first day to ensure that the whole “system” is working properly, thereby protecting your feet and making it as easy as possible for you to participate in your chosen activities.

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