Whether traveling for business or pleasure, many people spend a considerable amount of time deciding which types of shoes to pack – dress shoes, walking shoes, boots, sneakers for a workout, sandals for the beach and so forth. But equally important, especially for people whose feet are at risk, are the proper socks – ideally, padded socks that are appropriate for each type of activity you are likely to engage in.

Traveling often means negotiating unfamiliar terrain. Wearing the right padded socks and shoes can help protect the skin/soft tissue of the foot from cuts, bruises, blisters and other lesions; this is part of your first line of defense against foot ulcerations and infections. For amputees and other people whose feet are at risk, even a hotel room can be a minefield. Rooms are cleaned as well as possible before they are assigned to new guests, but many people have reported stepping on paper clips, pens, even bits of glass when walking around their room. So it makes sense to never go barefoot (and the same is true on the beach).

How do you choose the right padded socks and footwear? First, select padded socks that have been designed for specific activities, such as walking around a city or on a country road, golfing (know the type and terrain of the course you’ll be playing on), tennis, hiking, etc. The right padded socks will have terry fibers placed strategically below the foot’s fat pads to protect the skin/soft tissue during the moves that are unique to a particular sport or leisure pursuit. They will also be designed to work with the specific shoe or boot the activity requires.

Fabric also is important. Padded socks made of acrylic or acrylic blends help ensure the resilience of the terry fibers and wick moisture away from the foot. Those made from all-natural fibers (cotton, wool, silk) absorb moisture but don’t wick it away.
Additional ways to protect your feet (and health) while traveling:

• Wear shoes that are broken in, even if they are relatively new. Don’t pack a brand-new pair of shoes and hope they will be comfortable when you arrive at your destination. Purchasing the shoes while wearing the appropriate padded socks will help ensure the correct fit.

• If you’ll be doing a considerable amount of walking on the way to your destination (think airports) and when you arrive, make sure your shoes will stand up to the challenge. If you can splurge in one area, let it be on the proper padded socks and shoes for your main activity. Peer-reviewed, published studies have shown that wearing clinically tested padded socks can help prevent injuries to the skin/soft tissue of the foot caused by impact, pressure and shear forces.

• Wear padded socks in hotels and/or vacation homes to help avoid punctures or scratches or fungal and bacterial infections. Put clean towels on bathroom floors to avoid bacteria and infections.

• Practice good foot hygiene. Wash and thoroughly dry your feet every day while traveling, more often if you are involved in different activities. Use mild soap, wash between the toes, and dry thoroughly, especially between toes.
  • Inspect your feet at least twice a day. Check the top and bottom of your feet and between your toes. If you have trouble seeing the bottom or other parts of your feet, use a mirror to help you.

• If you see or feel bumps, lumps, blisters, bruises, cuts, sores or cracked skin on your foot, or experience pain or tingling or no feeling (numbness), you may need to contact a health professional quickly. Try to identify a health professional at your destination before you leave so you will know who to turn to if you have foot or other health problems.

from the foot; this can lead to slippage (a cause of blisters) and a wet environment that sets the stage for fungal infection and bacterial growth.

Once you’ve selected the appropriate padded socks, try them on with the proper footwear for your activities. Don’t cut corners by thinking you can wear running sneakers to go hiking, for example. The integrated approach helps ensure that your shoes, padded socks and any insert or orthotic prescribed or recommended by a foot health professional work together as a system. This means they should be purchased and/or tried on, and worn all together when you engage in any activity, including walking around your hotel room, by the pool or on the beach.