



Blisters, the bane of every hiker's existence, are caused by three factors: friction, moisture and heat. When you're trekking long distances, you're going to work up a sweat. Your temperature will go up, and naturally, there will be pressure and friction from both your boots and from going up and down the trail.

But, these inevitable factors don't mean you have to surrender to blisters. If you take the steps to keep your feet as cool, dry and friction-free as possible, then you can hopefully escape your next adventure without shredding them to pieces.

With that in mind, let's take a look at all of our top 10 tips for staying blister-free on your next hike.

How do you prevent blisters when hiking?

1. Choose boots that suit your feet

This tip sounds like a no-brainer, but the main offender when it comes to blisters is wearing shoes or boots that don't fit properly.

You could have a pair of the most expensive and high-tech boots on the market, but if they're too narrow, or too small you'll probably end up with a bunch of angry red blisters. When choosing footwear, keep in mind the conditions you'll use them in, the fit of the boots, the breathability of the style, and how much support they offer. A boot that's great for weekend day hikes isn't going to hold up on rocky terrain such as the Larapinta Trail for example.

If you're tossing up between a few models with different features, check out our footwear guide here which should hopefully put you in the right direction when it comes to getting the perfect fit.



Choose boots that cater to the needs of your feet, and the environment you're hiking in.

2. Lace your boots up properly

When you're putting on your boots, take the time to lace them up properly. Starting at the base of the laces, pull them firmly and work your way up so that they conform to your feet snugly all the way around.

The less friction there is, the lower the risk of getting a blister. You'd be surprised just how much this step can make a difference, so don't rush! Your feet will also swell while you walk, so adjust your lacing as you need to.



A lot of trouble can be avoided if you lace your boots on properly.

3. Wear your boots in to mould them to your feet

We don't want to sound like a broken record, but it is a good idea to make sure you wear your hiking boots in before you take them for a proper spin on the trail. There are three steps that we recommend you take to wear in your shoes:

4. Wear them at home

When you first get your boots, it's a good idea to go for a walk or have a shower before you put them on at home. This helps simulate the hot environment your feet will be in when you hike.

Then put on your hiking socks, and wear your boots around the house on clean surfaces. Walk up and down the stairs to test how they feel on an incline and decline, and do your best to mimic an uneven terrain. Take notes of any points where you might feel a pinch where a hotspot might form.

By testing them inside, you'll be able to return them if they're not the correct fit which will save you some strife in the long run. Once you're confident they're comfortable, then you can take it to the next level.



Lace on your shoes while you're at home to break them in.

5. Put them on for a walk

The next step is to take them for a test run outside. Whether it's for running a few errands on the weekend or taking your dog for a walk, ensure you wear your hiking socks (more on that below) so you'll be able to get a better picture of how your boots hold up out of the comfort of your house as well.

6. Then go on a day hike

Once you know that they're A-OK, you can head on a day hike in your local area to really put them through their paces. If you put in the time to wear your boots in, you'll have a good chance of staying comfy and blister-free on a longer trek.

But, before you jump into that, there are a few more things you should consider.



Once you've worn them around the house, or to walk your dog, a day hike is in order. Image: Merrell

7. Choose moisture-wicking socks

Whatever you do, take those value 5 pack cotton socks and shove them back into your drawer. They're perfect for wearing on your days off, but they're not suitable for long distance hikes. What you need are synthetic or wool socks, as they will wick moisture away from your feet. Less moisture means a reduced risk of blisters.

Your sock should come up past your boots so that the top of your boots don't rub on your ankle. So choose the height based on the shoe or boots you have. If you're serious about comfort and blister prevention, then the combination of a liner sock and a thicker sock is another trick you can use. This helps to prevent friction as the liner acts as a barrier for the thicker sock. Pick a liner sock that's lightweight, and made from a synthetic moisture-wicking material and then wear a thicker pair over the top.

Thicker socks are traditionally used for extra padding, but now you can get types that are padded in certain areas for comfort without the extra bulk. Ensure that there are no bunches in the liner before you put the second pair over the top so that you don't create any friction points. Also check that your boots still fit properly with the additional socks you've pulled on, especially when you first try them on.



Specialised hiking socks are an absolute must.

8. Tape any blister or hotspot prone areas

If you've got delicate skin that is prone to blisters, then it might help to use sports tape on certain areas of your feet before your hike. Apply the tape to a clean and dry surface and that you smooth it down firmly so there are no wrinkles or bumps.

And when you're actually out and about and you feel your feet getting warm – stop, and tape it while it's hot! If you leave it too long, then the blister will probably rear its ugly head.

9. Take breaks to cool off your feet

It's not always best to keep calm and carry on. If you feel a hotspot forming or your feet are getting overheated, stop and take off your socks and boots.

This will give you the opportunity to reduce swelling, dry your feet, and to manage any problem areas. It's also a good time to refresh and refuel before you head off again. Just make sure that if you're airing out your boots while you rest, that you do so out of direct sunlight. Leaving a pair of boots (especially ones with a full leather upper) in direct sunlight might make them shrink, which will cause even more friction.

By easing and treating hotspots, you can mitigate discomfort and potentially stop a blister from forming.



If your feet are struggling, stop for a rest to ease any hotspots. Image: Biolite

10. Use anti-chafing blister products

There are a few products that you can use before, or during a hike to help prevent and alleviate pain from blisters.

If the skin on your feet is susceptible to abrasions, then put on some anti-chafing balm, or vaseline if that works for you just on your problem areas before you lace your boots on. There are also foot powders available which will help to absorb moisture if that's a pain point for you.

How do you treat or care for blisters when hiking?

Keep a few things in your rucksack for blister management while you're bushwalking in case you do get a blister. There are so many different things that you can bring depending on what works for you.

You'll also have to balance what you take with how much space and weight you have free in your pack. You can get blister kits that come with everything you need, or you can customise your own. Here's a list of essentials to bring for blister treatment:

- Spare pair of socks



- Bandages
- A tool to drain a blister
- Lubricants
- Sports tape
- Blister patches so you can manage any problem areas.

What do I do if I get a blister?

1. If you do get a small blister, then don't try to pop it. Instead, dry the area, and apply a blister patch to prevent the 'roof' of the blister coming off.
2. If the blister is large and causing you a lot of pain, then you may have to drain it to prevent it popping on its own and getting infected.
3. Just make sure you sterilise the needle, dry and disinfect the area beforehand, and then wrap it in a clean bandage afterwards.



Keep the blister essentials that work for you in your rucksack.



Now grab your rucksack, lace up your boots and hit the trail!

If not taken care of properly, a tiny blister can blossom into a large, painful and stride-crippling sore that'll make it hard to enjoy the views of your hike.

It can take a bit of trial and error to find the perfect blister prevention method that works for you. But once you find it, you'll be able to jump into that next adventure with confidence.

How do you keep your feet in great condition when you walk, hike or run? Let us know what your tips and tricks are.