



Blisters, the bane of every hiker's existence, are caused by the skin being stretched back and forth with each step. This stretching (called shear) can become excessive when you're trekking long distances and working up a sweat. Plus, there's the added pressure from carrying your pack and the undulating terrain of 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 enjoy your next adventure without shredding them to pieces.

With that in mind, let's take a look at all of our top 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, their breathability (style and materials), 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 and feel 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 and be prepared to adjust your lacing during your walk as your feet swell with activity!



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:



• 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 while you hike.

Put on your hiking socks and take a walk around the inside of your house, keeping mindful of staying on clean surfaces in case you need to return your new purchase. 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 – it could be a potential hotspot.

If they are not the correct fit, you'll be grateful you took the time to test them out inside, as returning them in place of a more suitable pair will save you from the inevitable strife. 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.

• 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 away from the comfort of your home.

• 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 take the time to break in your boots, 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

4. 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 to prevent the top from rubbing against your ankle, so select your sock height based on the shoe or boots you'll be wearing. 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. The liner creates a barrier for the thicker sock and



reduces friction. Pick a liner sock that's lightweight, and made from a synthetic moisture-wicking material, 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 once you're wearing the additional socks, especially when you first try them.



Specialised hiking socks are an absolute must.

5. 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 then 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.

6. 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

7. 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.

By reducing friction levels with a greasy lubricant like Vaseline, a powdered lubricant like BlisterShield powder or a shoe patch like Engo Blister Patches, you protect the skin by making that area more slippery. If your sock can glide easily over your skin (via the lubricant) or your shoe (via the patch), you'll be minimising the excessive stretching in the skin that leads to blisters.



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 hotspot. You'll have to balance your management kit according to allowable space and weight 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 that Podiatrist Rebecca Rushton from [Blister Prevention](#) suggests to bring for blister treatment:

- Antibacterial hand gel – to clean your hands
- Antiseptic eg: Betadine
- Island dressings of various sizes eg: Band-Aids
- Hydrocolloid dressings of various sizes eg: Compeed
- Fixation tape
- A sterile lancing implement in case you need to drain your blister

Rebecca says you should treat your blister according to what the blister roof looks like. Is it intact, torn or deroofed? Watch this video [here](#) to learn more.

What do I do if I get a blister?

1. If you do get a small blister and it's not particularly painful, it's best not to pop it. Instead, protect the blister roof with an island dressing, something like a Band-Aid.
2. If the blister is large or causing you a lot of pain, then it may be best to drain so as to avoid it popping on its own and getting infected. Just make sure you sterilise your needle, or better still, have a sterile needle or scalpel blade in your blister kit. For more on how to safely pop a blister, check out this video [here](#).
3. Be sure to apply some antiseptic afterwards and cover it with an island dressing for protection.



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.

A very big thank you to [Rebecca Rushton BSc\(Pod\)](#) who, with over 25 years of clinical experience helped us with the accuracy of the information in this article.

How do you keep your feet in great condition when you walk, hike or run? Let us



know what your tips and tricks are.

