



Dangers to Homeless without Socks

Environmental:

Frostbite – socks provide a layer of warmth, worsened by smoking which constricts blood vessels making toes more susceptible to damage by cold. Severe frostbite leads to amputation.

Mechanical:

Hallux abductovalgus (bunions), Hammertoes, Pedal Exostosis, and various bony prominences become irritated by friction. Socks decrease friction between the shoes and the foot. Socks also help cushion the bottom of the foot. The friction leads to thickened skin (callus and corn formation or hyperkeratosis), which at its best is painful. It feels like walking with a rock in your shoe. Many homeless people have a condition called polyneuropathy. They lose nerve function and cannot feel irritations of their feet. The thickened skin can then break down to an ulcer. Neuropathic ulcers usually become infected and can cause cellulitis (skin infection), deadly sepsis (blood poisoning) or deep bone infections. In the lower extremities bone infections are cured by amputation. Antibiotic treatment is mostly ineffective in these cases. Populations who can be affected by neuropathy include Diabetics, Alcoholics, and patients on HIV medication, in other words, much of the homeless population.

Infectious:

Tinea Pedis (athletes foot): T.Pedis is a fungal infection of the skin caused by the organism *Trichophyton mentagrophytes* (vesicular or small blister formation between the toes) or *Trichophyton rubrum* (small circular dry areas which cover the entire bottom of the foot). Almost all of us have some fungi on our skin, but we do not all become infected with T. Pedis. We do not know all the factors that cause a T.Pedis infection but we do know the fungus likes warm, moist, dark places. Not

only do clean socks decrease the amount of contact anyone would have with the organism, but clean socks also create a layer of dryness to the skin which slows the growth of the organism. T.Pedis can create itchiness and burning. The areas of dryness can split and open the skin to bacterial infection.

Onychomycosis: Onychomycosis is the nail manifestation the same fungal infection. It has four categories of infection, but the most common type causes thickness, dystrophy of the nail. The thickness can be quite painful and also breaks down the surrounding skin, and leads to an infected ingrown nail. Again compromised patients, those with other disease processes, are at higher risk to develop ulcers, cellulitis, sepsis, and bone infections. Socks can help prevent against onychomycosis in the same way they protect against T.Pedis.

Plantar Warts: Plantar warts are caused by a virus. We have no anti-viral drugs to fight the virus. We believe the virus can enter the skin through an area of trauma (walking with no socks/shoes). Once the virus manifests itself as a skin lesion it mostly resembles a callous. The warts commonly multiply and become painful.

Social:

The Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners published the results of a survey of the utilization of foot care services among homeless adults. The results showed “An overwhelming number of respondents ($n=62$) felt that the embarrassment associated with the smell of feet and the poor condition of their shoes and socks were deterrents in using available foot care services. One individual’s response to who can use the foot care services was “those who are willing to be embarrassed!”” By not using foot health care services the homeless population does not get any preventative foot care, which has shown to be very helpful in compromised individuals. Providing clean, new socks helps those in need to get one step closer to health care.

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