

If you are going to hike, you have no choice but to have happy feet, otherwise you will be miserable and quit this first class activity before you reap any of its many benefits. Let's start with socks and work into boots.

### Socks

- Use the "sock and a half" system
- Next to your foot is a liner sock made of polypropylene
- This helps protect your foot from blisters by keeping it dry.
- Outer sock of mostly wool, preferably a loop wool construction. This system can be used all year however if you prefer something a little lighter for the summer, a synthetic sock such as a Thorlo Light Trekking sock, again with loop construction can be substituted.
- Cotton is not a suitable fabric for a hiking sock as the cotton fabric becomes wet quickly, stays wet and provides no cushioning, it does however promote blisters.
- Air your feet at lunch time and for a real treat change both the liner and outer sock. If you have a heat rash around your ankle, apply a zinc oxide cream (Teddy's Choice for diaper rash) prior to the hike and avoid wearing gaiters when it is warm.



### Boots

- Light weight full grain leather boots are the best bet for most hiking as they provide good protection for the feet, good support for the ankles and can be cleaned and waterproofed easily.
- Some boots have a Gore Tex lining but this adds cost to the boots, does not last the life of the boot and should not be necessary with a leather boot waterproofed with a product such as Nix Wax Aqueous or Paste wax.
- Fitting of the boots is very important. Many times throughout the year hikers will complain of black toe nails or sore toes when going down hill and as few trails are flat we do lots of that. The most common problem is boots that are too short. Nobody wants to have boots that look big so they purchase boots that "just fit" and that is when the problems start. Purchase boots that are about a half size larger than "just fit". My boots have about a half inch extra space past my toes and like magic no sore or black toes.
- Take your sock and a half system to the store when you are trying on boots.
- Purchase boots late in the day when your feet are at their largest and after you have gone for a good walk.
- A hike on a trail for any distance is not the place to break in boots and get your feet and ankles used to the feel of them. The best place is walks around home of an increasing distance until everything feels right.
- Purchase your boots from a reputable outdoor store that has a good selection, and an incline ramp for testing the down hill.
- Expect to pay not less than \$200.00 for your boots. However you should get many happy kilometres from them. I use mine as winter boots around town as well.
- A sad fact of life is that as we age our nose, ears and feet grow so those nice hiking boots of a few years ago may now be too short (and we know what problems that causes). Don't wear them, the Salvation Army needs them.
- The resoling of boots is not usually a good idea, when the soles are worn out the uppers are usually soft and your feet may have changed size. Resoling is usually expensive as well.
- Some hikers have problems with blisters until their feet and boots are broken in. If you have a spot that is prone to blisters or are starting to get a "hot spot" cover the area with a piece of Dr. Schol's mole skin (he really does not skin moles for this product). Many hikers will replace the liner foot bed that comes with boots with an orthotic device. You will need advice from a podiatrist (expensive) or a good boot fitter (less expensive).



Hike leaders are usually a good source of information about equipment as they have seen many of the problems that the wrong stuff causes.

Happy hiking,  
Greg



#### *About Greg*

Greg is an experienced and certified hike leader and instructor. He has been a long time member of the Bruce Trail Association ([www.bruce-trail.org](http://www.bruce-trail.org)), the Grand Valley Trails Association ([www.gvta.on.ca](http://www.gvta.on.ca)) and other hiking organizations. Greg has an extensive background in aviation and air traffic control. Greg has taught introduction to hiking courses and map and compass courses for several years. Currently his website, Greg Vincent's Hiking Site, resides at <http://home.golden.net/%7Egvincent/>

Other The Right Stuff articles are:

- “On the Up and Up” or Icy Walking
- Clothing (how to keep warm & dry)
- Packs (what kind to carry & what to put in them)
- Bugs (how to avoid them & prevent their bothering you)
- Trail Safety (how to ensure you hike without incident)
- Trekking Poles (modern ones - what are they & why use them)
- Winter Walking (all the peculiarities of hiking in cold climes)
- Medical Emergencies (how to prepare for & respond to a medical emergency while hiking)
- Warm Weather Walking (the scoop on hiking in warm weather)
- Snowshoeing (If you can walk, you can snowshoe – no ifs, ands or buts.)
- Global Positioning System or GPS (What is it and how it works.)