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Myth Buster #1

Skiing or Riding Makes Your Feet Cold

Having skied in New England for over 40 years, I have learned a few things about keeping my feet warm. This battle can be fought and won by controlling your body's natural heat-robbing properties and fighting nature's chill using "electric warfare," "chemical warfare" or "thermal warfare."

Perspiration might be a problem to your whole body when the thermometer drops. However, your foot has over 25,000 sweat glands, so foot perspiration must be addressed even when the rest of your body is not perspiring. To have warm feet while skiing you must have fairly dry feet with good blood circulation. To provide this I use foot powder and socks that wick away moisture. Socks come in a variety of materials (wool, silk and synthetics) and many companies offer blends of these materials that work well. You should be sure to keep the sock the right thickness (light-medium weight) so your boot will not compress the foot and cause a lack of circulation. As a bootfitter, I know that for good circulation there are two critical areas of the foot you do not want to overly compress.

The number one spot for excessive boot compression is the area below the bottom two buckles (the instep area). Second is the area right behind and under the ankle bones. Put too much pressure on either of these areas and you loose circulation and thus warmth. If your boots compress either of these areas then you should see a bootfitter. He will probably lower the bootboard (zeppa) or remove excessive padding in the liners.

People with poor circulation, diabetes or Raynauds Syndrome might consider boots with thermo-fit liners or aftermarket thermo-fit liners (Dalebello is one manufacturer) which have been proven to be warmer than standard liners because of their thermal properties and ability to mold to the foot and shell, thus helping to prevent compression.

While on the thermal warfare subject, I would definitely recommend the product called "Boot Glove". This is a neoprene material that fastens around the lower part of the boot shell. They work well on cold, windy or powder days, and do not hinder your ability to play with your lower buckles. One product I have not yet tried is "HeatShields." This multi-layered material (like the space blanket) is glued onto the outside of the liners, attempting to reflect your natural heat back to your feet.

Finally, on the thermal warfare front, "just say no" to cotton socks and remember the rule of

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opposites. If you insulate your head and hands with a good hat and good gloves, your feet will be warmer too. It's true!

Once you have good thermal tactics, many skiers try chemical warfare. By that I don't mean putting chili pepper on your feet; that is a myth I would like to see "Myth Busters" TV show tackle. Chemical warfare means using foot and hand warmers in your boots or gloves. These packs have iron and other chemicals that when exposed to oxygen heat up. The ones for boots are smaller and thinner than hand packs. I have used these and have had two problems. First, directions suggest sticking them under your toes. My feet did not like this at all. I stuck them on top of my toes with much better results. However, I will have to blow out the toe box of my boots for the warmers to fit.

A bigger problem with the toe warmer is the need for oxygen to keep the chemical reaction going. I found that the packs' heating power went away in about an hour, but when I took them out of the boots they got nice and warm again. Fresh air rejuvenated their power.

One avid skier I know has doubled-up on the thermal and chemical warfare. He tapes a hand warmer (bigger and more powerful than toe warmer) to the inside of the toe area of the Boot Glove which then heats the toe of the boots, and also gets plenty of fresh air to get the maximum heat out of the packs.

Then there is "electric warfare!" I have used boot heaters since they came installed in my pair of Lange "Pink Panther" ski boots and I have installed boot heaters since they became an option. Their performance is dependent on battery technology and to some extent on keeping the batteries warm. The two big players in aftermarket electric boot heaters are Therm-ic and Hotronic. There are a host of other companies, some of which use AA batteries. These units come with batteries of either Ni-CAD, Ni-MH or Lithium-ion, with chargers that have gotten smarter and faster. The heating element goes under your toes. The batteries can be mounted to your boots, strapped to your leg or, with extension cords, kept inside your coat pockets.

Mounting to your boots is the most common practice, but you must watch out for the chair lift knocking them off while loading (if positioned too high) or stairs knocking them off (if mounted too low). If maintained (charging-discharging properly) and professionally mounted, these could be the ultimate weapon in the battle for warm feet.

Remember, *warm feet are possible when you have dry feet*! This means using a boot drier or pulling the liners out each night, using the proper type and size of sock (thin is warmer than too thick) and, when it gets nasty outside, using thermal, chemical or electric warfare. ❄