



GETTING THE BOOT

BY SHERRY BALLOU HANSON

“OUTSIDE OF YOUR GUN, NOTHING IS SO IMPORTANT TO YOUR OUTFIT AS YOUR FOOTWEAR,”

said Leon Leonwood Bean, founder of giant outdoor retailer L.L. Bean and creator of the famous Maine Hunting Shoe.

“Hunting boots are usually pretty com-

fortable, with plenty of space for the toes,” said Terry Philbin, D.O., an orthopaedic surgeon at Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Center in Columbus, Ohio. “It is usually other shoes that have created a problem prior to buying the boots.”

So if your foot savvy has not kept up with your boot size, you may actually be contributing to your own discomfort.

IT COULD BE JUST YOU

Many foot disorders are inherited. The Framingham Foot study of 2,179 participants from 2002 through 2005 found two of the most common disorders — *hallux valgus* (big toe curves toward the little toe) and *pes cavus* (high arches) — are inheritable.

The most common foot deformities Philbin sees are bunion deformity or flat feet.



Did you inherit bad feet?

Twenty to 60 percent of adults have an inherited foot disorder; here are some of the most common:

- **Bunion** — a hard bony protuberance on outside at base of big toe
- **Hallux valgus** — when the big toe angles toward the pinky
- **Pes cavus** — high arches, hard to fit, need cushioning, prone to stress fractures
- **Flat feet** — low arches, more prone to bunions, need more support
- **Keratoderma** — yellowing and thickening on heel and lateral foot surface

“Feet get longer over time and can spread wider, which can cause arches to fall,” she said. “This can happen with age, or sometimes heredity or an injury. A worn out tendon in the arch can also cause the foot to flatten.”

DON'T GET YOUR FEET WET

There is a right boot and a right sock for the conditions. “Some folks think their boot is leaking when in actuality, it’s just a perspiring foot,” said Kevin Murray, a hunting product developer for L.L. Bean. “This is where waterproof, breathable construction and materials really shine. They let the perspiration evaporate, while keeping the foot dry from water outside the boot. In warmer weather use a non-insulated boot to ensure your feet don’t get too warm.”

Socks that wick away moisture are a must, as wet feet get cold easily, especially in a cold climate. Diabetics especially need to be vigilant, said Philbin, as their feet can get chilled and they could develop hypothermia. Nike’s Dry-Fit and L.L. Bean’s Cresta wool-blend socks, All Sport Socks and L.L. Bean Boot Socks work well to wick away moisture.

FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

“Hunting is a demanding activity that often requires a lot of walking over extremely rough terrain,” said Murray. The biggest mistake women make when buying a pair of boots or shoes is not having their feet

measured. If a boot does not feel good, try a different one. Try both on as one foot may be longer than the other. Be sure you can wiggle all of your toes.

“You should never wear a pair of boots into the field until you’ve done an adequate job of breaking them in,” said Murray. For the best fit, go shopping for your product in the afternoon when your feet are at their largest and bring the socks you will be wearing under the boot.

Pain in the foot or ankle while wearing your boots is not normal. If the boots themselves are not causing the problem, you need to have your feet evaluated by a physician or orthopaedic surgeon before you end up with bigger problems like

stress fractures, arthritis or ligament and tendon tears.

According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, in the U.S., 90 percent of foot surgery is performed on women, mostly because they wear shoes

that are too small.

Don’t hold onto the old favorites too long, especially if you notice an uneven wear pattern on the soles.

The high-arched foot is fairly rigid and more prone to stress fractures. If you have these feet you need a boot with plenty of cushioning properties. If you have flat feet, buy boots with good support under the arch. 🐾



Bone spurs, bunions and hammertoes

- Usually occurring on the bottom of the heel, a **bone spur** can result from arthritis, an injury or just too many miles in the boots. You can treat a bone spur with stretching, icing, taping or wearing orthotics in the boots. Sometimes a cortisone shot or shock wave therapy is used if other remedies don’t relieve the pain.
- **Bunions**, those big bumps on the outside of your grandmother’s big toe, tend to run in families, and the more mobile a woman’s feet are, the more susceptible she is. Typically, bunions don’t begin to form until the 20s or 30s and wearing orthotics can slow the development process. Many orthopaedic surgeons will suggest surgery only when the bunion causes pain and makes fitting shoes and boots difficult.
- A **hammertoe** occurs when a bunion puts pressure on the second toe and the toe pops up and looks like a little hammer. Like bunions, this condition results from improper foot biomechanics, though foot trauma can also cause a toe to “hammer.”

Calluses, warts and more

- A **callus**, also known as a corn, is usually a footwear issue caused by rubbing. Try paring down the callus with a pumice stone, or use a donut-shaped corn remover to shift pressure off the area. If badly fitting footwear is to blame, it’s time to choose new boots.
- The human papilloma virus is the cause of the **common wart** and it spreads easily. You can use an over-the-counter remedy, but persist until the wart is completely gone. Consult a dermatologist if your efforts don’t work. The dermatologist’s treatment, typically with liquid nitrogen or another product, works faster anyway.
- **Tinea pedis**, otherwise known as **athlete’s foot**, has been around forever and is also highly contagious. The easiest way to treat it is using an anti-fungal foot powder religiously. If you stop, the condition will return. There are stronger medicines your dermatologist can prescribe if needed.
- You may not have heard of **pitted keratolysis**, but it is usually associated with sweaty feet like those that have been in the boots all day. Little pits develop on the underside of the feet; your socks stick to your feet and smell like ammonia by the end of the day. This condition is treatable with a topical or oral antibiotic and keeping the feet dry.