

# Stepping Out, Not Stepping On

by Eunice Ramsey-Parker, DPM, MPH. Clinic Administrator, Foot Center of New York



Recently one of the doctors at our Foot Center examined a woman who had an abscess (large infected blister) on the sole of her foot; she thought she had stepped on something while walking barefoot in a tropical country. She had – our doctor pulled a parasitic worm out of her foot!

That particular danger

doesn't present itself here in New York, but it's a real possibility in a number of tropical countries (and Florida!) where walking barefoot outdoors is common. Many tropical countries (e.g., Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico) also have high rates of diabetes, and the combination is often deadly. **DIABETICS SHOULD NEVER WALK BAREFOOT, EVEN INDOORS, EVEN ON A RUG.** If people with normal circulation want to walk barefoot indoors, just make sure to avoid small dropped items or pet accidents. There is still a danger of stepping on broken glass or a rusty nail.

Outdoors is another sto-

ry. No other animals wear foot coverings, but human animals need them; our feet originally walked on softer, giving landscapes. Today, shoes protect our feet from the impact of walking on hard surfaces plus from cuts and scrapes. Shoes (not flip-flops), absorb some of this impact.

What if you want to wiggle your toes in cool grass, warm sand or in the ocean? Shoes will protect your feet in all of these situations, but if you want to go barefoot, nothing can replace watching where you put your feet. If you're walking in grass, watch out for insects that don't like being stepped on. At the beach look for sharp

shells and discarded soda can tabs. It's easy to step on a sharp shell or piece of trash if water isn't perfectly clear; water shoes can protect you there.

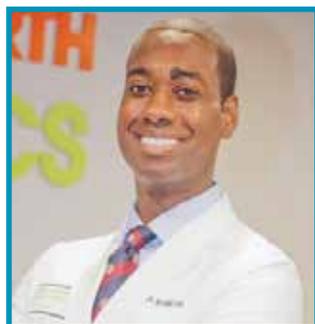
Do some shoes cause other problems? Of course, but their protective function is paramount in our modern environments.

Want to go barefoot? Just think about it ahead of time. Except diabetics: Never do it!

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