

Weekend Doctor

By **DR. THOMAS F. VAIL**

Dust off your Frisbee and find the cooler: It's time to head for a backyard cookout or a picnic in the park. This is what you dreamed about all through those cold, crummy winter months.

But, eager as you are to get out there and play some tag football, or to hit the hammock with a burger clutched in each fist, you need to be warned.

Here are some foot tips for a safer summer picnic:

- See a foot and ankle surgeon within 24 hours for a puncture wound. Why?

These injuries can embed unsterile foreign objects deep inside the foot.

A puncture wound must be cleaned properly and monitored as it heals. This will help to avoid complications such as tissue and bone infections or damage to tendons and muscles in the foot.

- Beware of charcoal or a stray "hot" coal on the ground. Why?

They can be dangerous in the bag or out. Some bags may weigh 10 pounds or more, and that force increases when they drop on your bare foot.

Toe and nail injuries can lead to permanently deformed toenails that become susceptible to fungus.

People can also suffer serious burns from accidentally stepping on stray campfire coals or fireworks. That stray sparkler on the ground can cause a nasty burn if stepped on with a bare foot.

- Make sure you've been vaccinated against tetanus. Experts recommend teens and adults get a booster shot every 10 years. Why?

Cuts and puncture wounds from sharp objects can lead to infections and illnesses such as tetanus.

If your summer just wouldn't be the same without kicking off your shoes, you can still stay safe. Just watch where you walk!

- Watch out for holes covered by grass! Why?

The jarring that occurs when a person takes a step and then meets air, not solid ground, and subsequently hits hard after just falling a few inches can cause a great deal of damage to the foot, including breaks and fractures.

- Watch out for that cool breeze and falling asleep on that pretty colored blanket. Why?

Feet get sunburned, too, and rare but deadly skin cancers can develop on the feet. Apply sunscreen to the tops and bottoms of your feet, not just your legs.

- Inspect your feet and your children's feet on a routine basis for skin problems such as warts, calluses, ingrown toenails and suspicious moles, spots or freckles. Why?

The earlier a skin condition is detected, the easier it is for your foot and ankle surgeon to treat it.

- Wear slides or sandals around swimming pools, locker rooms and beaches. Why?

Wearing this foot protection can help you avoid cuts and abrasions from rough anti-slip surfaces and sharp objects hidden beneath sandy beaches, and prevent contact with bacteria and viruses that can cause athlete's foot, plantar warts and other problems.

- Use common sense with going barefoot. Why?

Every year, people lose toes while mowing the lawn barefoot.

People with diabetes should never go barefoot, even indoors, because their nervous system may not "feel" an injury and their circulatory system will struggle to heal breaks in the skin.

So you see, don't just let the ants or mosquitoes ruin your picnic. Be careful and protect your feet.



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