Foot health on expedition

Investigating the impact of foot injuries on expedition success

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Introduction

On expedition you can expect to spend a lot of your time of your feet. They are the key to carrying us safely through an expedition and looking after them is imperative.

So how best to do this?

That's what we have not only investigated in this research but improved; by developing a plan for future explorers to keep their feet healthy.

Method

The sixty eight participants were explorers of all ages and gender, with the inclusion criteria being that they had been on an expedition, trek or hike of three days or longer within the context of an organised expedition.

The data was further divided into enviornment:

- Mountain
- Tropical
- Desert
- UK Rural

Results

The data showed that over half of our participants sustained foot injuries which impeded or cut short their expedition. *(Figure 1)*. The distribution of these injuries is detailed in *(Figure 2)*.

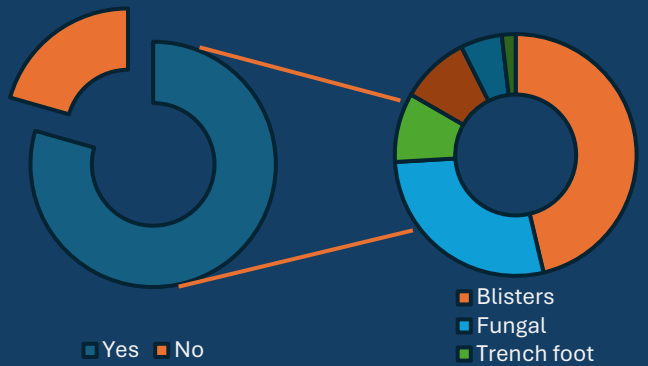


Figure 1: Proportion of participants incurring foot injuries on expedition

Figure 2: Distribution of foot injuries incurred on expedition

The link between environment and injury type is detailed in *(Figure 3)*.

The data demonstrated those who incurred injury were the least prepared:

- 61% did not break in their boots
- 63% had no briefing
- 50% examined their feet less than daily
- 40% did not carry a first aid kit

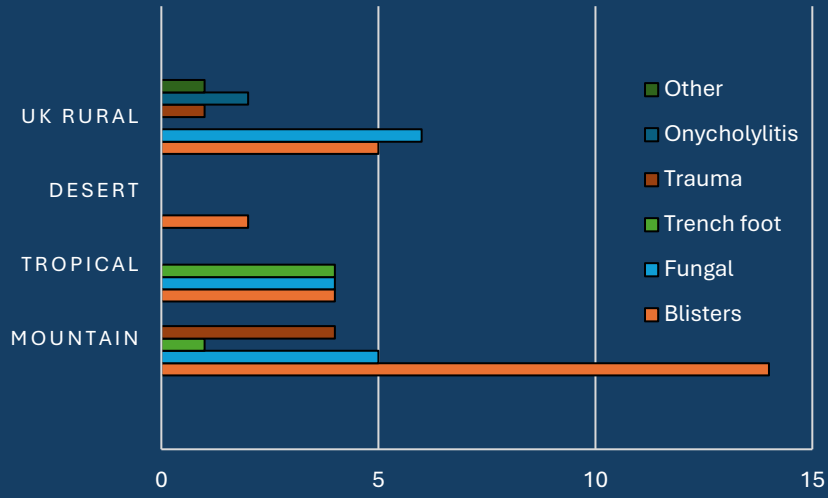


Figure 3:Distribution of injury by environment

Conclusion

We have demonstrated that when foot care isn't prioritised, expeditions can be compromised. Blisters, trauma, onycholysis, fungal infections; all common and preventable problems. To address foot damage on expeditions we have created seven top recommendations for people to carry with them, as a reminder to care for their feet.

Seven steps to ensuring good foot health on your expedition

1) Invest in boots with ankle support
2) Break in your boots prior to expedition
3) First aid kit supplies (blister plasters, elastic ankle support tape, athletes foot powder)
4) Trim your nails before embarking
5) Wear dry socks
6) Wash, dry and inspect your feet every evening
7) Don't ignore the early signs of foot deterioration