

GEAR TEST | BLISTER REMEDIES

Physical Culture | At Trail's End, There's Nothing Like Happy Feet



Chris Ramirez for The New York Times

Jennifer Garofalini

By YISHANE LEE

DESPITE improvements in socks and shoes, blisters remain a sports injury that won't go away. "It's one of the most common minor injuries among outdoor enthusiasts," said Dr. Christopher Van Tilburg, the author of "Mountain Rescue Doctor" and the editor of the magazine Wilderness Medicine. "It's not often reported so we don't have a lot of statistics, but it's very, very common and can be extremely debilitating on a long hike."

Blisters form when friction and pressure cause the skin's layers to separate. To deflect friction, hikers have long used slick petroleum jelly and sticky moleskin to protect incipient or existing blisters. Thanks to some innovations

in products that treat or stave off blisters, hikers can now use nongreasy, nonstaining waxes fortified with moisturizing aloe as a preventive, and gel pads or breathable plastic to cushion blisters.



Jamel Toppin for The New York Times

Jennifer Garofalini, above, the director of land protection at the Mohonk Preserve in the Hudson Valley in New York State, recently tested five blister remedies. She sampled two products that prevent blisters and three that cure them during daylong hikes inspecting some of the perimeter of the 6,500-acre preserve.

SAM BLIST-O-BAN \$7.99 for six pads, www.rescue-essentials.com. Two thin layers of water-resistant breathable plastic (with no gel) backed by adhesive deflect friction by gliding against each other. "This was my favorite," said Ms. Garofalini. "It completely halted any progress and cured" a developing blister, she said, adding that it was "easy to apply, undetectable while walking and stayed put perfectly."

ADVENTURE MEDICAL KITS GLACIERGEL BLISTER AND BURN DRESSINGS \$9.90 for six pads, www.mountaingear.com. These see-through, water-filled gel pads cushion blisters and absorb leakage without needing a separate dressing. Ms. Garofalini said these, her "second favorite," were good for "really bad blisters" because the padding was slightly thicker than the Blist-O-Ban. The slim, waterproof-bag packaging made it "easy to carry and use in the field," she added.

SPENCO 2ND SKIN SPORT BLISTER PADS \$9.99 for 12 pads, www.footsmart.com. Ms. Garofalini used this transparent gel pad on a toe blister. "It had a thick gel center and seemed to be effective," she said, but was difficult to remove from its sheet without its "sticking back on itself." "I had to ruin a couple pads before one came off," she said. "It stayed in place, but not as well" as the others tested.

BODYGLIDE ANTI-CHAFING SKIN PROTECTANT STICK \$9.99 for 1.3 ounces, www.amazon.com. Using plant-derived waxes, this product creates a moist barrier between the skin and potentially blister-inducing gear. Although it was "very slippery" and "a lot messier than the Slik Stik," Ms. Garofalini said, she "experienced no chafing or hot spots," areas where blisters start forming. "My feet weren't as fatigued as they normally would have been," she added.

PROFOOT SLIK STIK \$5.19 for 0.5 ounce, www.drugstore.com. With a texture like a stick deodorant, this blister-prevention product is composed of synthetic wax, moisturizing aloe and other botanicals. Ms. Garofalini said it felt "less greasy" than BodyGlide but didn't seem to make a difference when applied on a trouble spot on the top ridge of her foot. "I can't say it did much of anything," she said.