

# Look after your feet – winter's coming

*Jane E. Greenwood* tells how training in homeopathy has helped improve her healthcare practice both at home with her family and in her professional life as a podiatrist

If I may begin by painting a picture for you. Imagine, nestled in the steep-sided slope of a mountainous region in Switzerland, a chocolate box image of a village. The roofs of the timbered homes are heavy with snow and the drip-drip sounds from the effect of the brilliant, warm spring sun echo around. Brightly-coloured clothes capture your attention along with squeals of delight as the children, whose ruddy faces express glee, speed down the gradients on sledges, skis, and boards.

Yes, it's February half-term school holidays and it is the annual skiing trip. At this time of year Leysin becomes a small ski resort easily accessible by public transport from Geneva airport, the final leg being a mountain railway that takes you from the valley bottom up through vineyards and into deep snow-covered pastureland. The ski schools have English-speaking instructors who are extremely caring with their charges, reassuring apprehensive parents who fear for their offspring's safety. Hang on a minute, what is all this to do with homeopathy I hear you shout. Well are you sitting comfortably? Then I will explain ...

## **Frolics in the snow**

Having qualified as a podiatrist in 1987 at Huddersfield University and then in 2002 with the Faculty of Homeopathy at the Academic Departments of Glasgow Homeopathic Hospital under the main tutelage of Dr David Reilly MD, and Dr Tariq Khan, podiatrist, I was well versed in the use of homeopathy in a limited way in acute conditions. Also, being the mother of three young children, I used remedies on a regular basis to counteract the various bumps, scrapes and encounters with wildlife that they presented me with. So much so, I carried (and still do) Aconite 30c around with me all the time.

Leysin was our ski resort of choice in February 2005, having introduced the children to the delights of the winter slopes the year previously. Off we went aiming for the children to have a full week of expert tuition leaving some free ski time for my husband and me. Ski lessons were booked for the eldest and youngest child. However, the middle child being very adventurous and having a "no-fear" outlook on life, wanted to snowboard. By the fourth day, things

were going well. We were feeling invigorated, having overcome remembered challenges like how not to fall on your bottom when walking down a slope with skis in one hand and poles in the other; and the art of going to the toilet without dangling glasses, hats, gloves and sleeves into the toilet basin. It is also surprising how you quickly gain a hearty appetite counteracting any thought of arriving home a few pounds lighter following all the exercise.



*Tim, Daniel, Nathan and Lauren Greenwood before the accident*

Photo: courtesy of Jane E. Greenwood

## The accident

The family was using Arnica 30c to ease the tired, aching muscles felt in the calves and upper body, along with the soothing effects of a warm deep bath with a few drops of lavender oil added to aid relaxation and sleep.

On the fifth morning, time was forcing us to rush to the ski schools to make the lesson start times. This was when the accident happened. The snowboarding hero fell with full weight on his arm. We knew something major had happened. First aid training came into action, out came the Aconite 30c, one tablet administered. The distressed patient was made more comfortable by packing the painful limb with snow to reduce swelling whilst husband hurried to ski shop next door for help. The shop offered a lift to local GP/trauma clinic, fortunately only a few doors down.

The patient was assessed immediately by a nurse, then GP, conversing in English. Then the question, "Has he been given anything?" I replied, "One tablet of 30c Aconite." Good was the reply. "We will give him Arnica 7CH and a dose of pain killer too". I was flabbergasted, however wonderfully reassured, to receive an integrated service.

Our son was extremely brave. He underwent an x-ray to check the extent of the damage, which turned out to be, in the doctor's words "like your name, Greenwood, a greenstick fracture". Continuing with the green theme, he chose this colour for the cast. Upon asking the medical professionals about the availability of homeopathy in Switzerland, they replied, "Some accept it, others do not, and it is not used widely." Departing the surgery, the onlookers, namely the patient's parents, self-administered Aconite 30c to help with the shock of the event.

All this occurred within the hour just in time to collect his brother and sister from their ski school – what a wonderful service and all within a few hundred metres of the accident. Rapid recovery from the event ensued with help from Arnica 30c four doses throughout the rest of the day and then twice daily for the next two days and lots of tender loving care. The following day we relied on our feet alone for transport and visited the peak of La Berneuse 2048m high above the village via the cable car to the Kuklos restaurant for a last lingering look at the view. Later in the day, the ski school's presentation ceremony rewarded all three children with medals, a just reward.



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*Arnica plant in flower*

Upon arrival back into the UK, the NHS followed up, reporting no complications, just replacing the larger cast with a smaller one. Symphytum 30c followed Arnica, twice daily for two days, to help accelerate bone union, accompanied by a high calcium diet and sunlight whenever possible. Upon further investigation, the 7CH as used by the doctor in Switzerland is the same as 7c – that is, it is on the centesimal scale as we use in the UK. However, here the remedies are mostly available as 6c and not 7CH.

## Daily footcare

You have heard the tale of a mum using homeopathy in a first aid situation in winter. Now, with my other hat on, as a podiatrist I will tell you about how to take care of your feet in winter. No matter what time of year it is, we should all know and carry out the basics of foot care on a daily basis.

The first thing is to wash the feet using warm water and a mild soap. Dry the feet well using a soft towel especially, but gently, in-between the toes. This is the time to use your senses to check for anything out of the ordinary. Are there any lesions present that were not there yesterday? Is the skin even in colour or are there areas of redness or other colours? Are the nails a healthy pink colour or are there striations of yellow, white, or even blue?

I cannot stress this enough as being such an important procedure to carry out. You are with your feet every day, and you will be the one to spot any problems. By doing this, it could stop you getting to the point where your body lets you know there is something wrong by causing you pain. Of course, if you are a diabetic then the pain alert may not occur at this stage as in some cases the peripheral nerves are damaged and cease relaying messages back to the brain hence no injuries are registered. Ultimately this may lead to more serious complications.

Other systemic health issues may increase the risk of damage to the feet, such as long-term steroid therapy or anti-rejection therapy, both lowering the immunity producing an increased susceptibility to infection, and the former thinning the skin reducing an important defence mechanism. At this point in the proceedings, I must emphasise that I would never suggest changing any conventional medication that you are already taking, in pursuit of the homeopathic approach. In many cases these drugs are life-saving. Homeopathy can help to fill therapeutic gaps and help with side-effects of conventional medication; however conventional medicine has its place. Having checked your feet if you find anything untoward seek advice from your statutorily registered chiropodist or podiatrist.

## Footcare maintenance

Make sure your nails are short. Using toenail clippers (not the kitchen scissors), follow the shape of the top of your toe. If there are any you cannot cut, file instead, using an emery board. Moisturise the feet with a plant-based emollient (more easily absorbed than a mineral oil based product). Generally, creams have high water content for use on the skin, as skin is water-loving so absorption takes place easily. The converse is true with nails; oil is required to condition them as they repel water. Therefore, a spot of olive oil used daily will help keep them healthy. If the clefts of the toes are excessively moist then use surgical spirits, applying with a cotton wool bud. Prevention of many foot problems will occur if you follow this advice.

## Winter footcare

In the northern hemisphere, the cold is probably the main thing to consider in addition to the daily footcare regime. Again, prevention is better than cure. Be



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of blisters, bruising, sprains, and fractures will ensue with this correct choice. Boots need to be snug but not impinge on any structures of the foot. If after the first few runs downhill, you experience numbness or tingling then they need adjusting until it stops. Socks must insulate and keep moisture away from the foot. Only wear one pair, and do not tuck your trousers into the boot, as this will cause uneven pressure on the lower limb.

### First aid kit for feet

After all the preventative work beforehand, things do invariably happen, as you have already read. So be prepared with a first aid kit for feet. You have heard of some of the most important homeopathic remedies: Aconite 30c for shock and fright, Arnica 30c for bruising, both to be used as soon as possible and repeated up to six doses the first day then reduced to twice daily until symptoms improve. At that stage stop taking the remedy.

Symphytum 30c for fractures would follow on from Arnica for a couple of days, depending on how the fracture is healing and how serious the break was initially.

The kit should contain a selection of creams: Arnica cream for application to unbroken, bruised skin, and Tamas cream for chilblains. In addition, it would be wise to add plasters containing a gel to protect unbroken blisters, and some containing Calendula to heal broken ones.

If you have pre-existing foot problems, it would be wise to visit your podiatrist well in advance to check and treat them before jetting off to the snow. They can recommend further footcare to enable you to keep your feet healthy.

My enthusiasm for homeopathy and my vocation in general, have gained momentum; I have experienced remarkable results when I have integrated homeopathy into my private work as a podiatrist. The patients inspire me to keep trying to introduce it into my NHS practice. This is a much bigger challenge than I anticipated; however, I am prepared, with like-minded colleagues, to continue with the cause.

aware of exposing the feet to extremes of temperature as this can lead to the formation of chilblains. This condition is where the tiny blood vessels in the toes shut down in response to cold and pressure. Upon toasting them in front of an open fire or on a hot water bottle, they become red, itchy and painful. Therefore, to prevent them, pick hosiery and footwear with care. Wear one pair of well-fitting socks that keep your feet dry and warm. Most high street stores stock these with the approach of the winter months.

Footwear needs to be foot-shaped to prevent impinging on the toes and constricting blood supply. Thermal and breathable linings to shoes and boots will help. However, if you do succumb to getting a chilblain then a cream containing Tamas (*Tamus communis* – Black Bryony, a flowering plant) should

help. If chilblains become a regular occurrence, consult your podiatrist for further investigations as an underlying medical condition may be present.

### Skiing

If you do decide to head off to the slopes then try to get more active before you go, your whole body will thank you for it. As with any sport, warm up before launching off down the slope. Wear suitable warm, breathable clothing. Pick your boots with great care, avoidance



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