

Bare Feet

Walking across a sun kissed beach enjoying the warm sand on your feet and toes is all part of the tropical holiday dream. There's little danger walking across a clean beach in the sunshine.

For many children and adults living in South Sudan owning and wearing a pair of shoes or even the simplest of sandals is a luxury. Protecting the feet is mandatory, as even the smallest injury can involve long periods of immobility, expensive treatment and debilitating loss of income. Most farmers work hard to grow crops to feed their families and an injury to a foot can be life threatening to a family.

Sharp injuries caused by broken glass or a sharp stone are exceedingly painful and will not heal without adequate rest and often there is a need for antibiotics. Blunt injuries can be even more serious, as years of low grade trauma to a foot can be disabling, leading to deformity and loss of function.

Simple sandals not only protect against sharp and blunt trauma but will also protect against hookworm infection. Hookworm is in the soil and enters the human body through the skin of the foot. It can cause a number of symptoms as it rampages through the body.

It may cause bleeding of vital organs and children and the elderly will be most affected by the anaemia. A heavy dose of hookworm may lead to weight loss, fatigue, abdominal pain and diarrhoea. The treatment is relatively simple but may not be available in rural South Sudan.

Roundworm eggs and larvae found in the soil often contain hookworm. Roundworms will enter the body through infected food and dirty hands. They live out their life in the intestinal tract and will cause at best low grade abdominal pain and distension. At worst they may grow to obstruct the intestine and may require surgery to relief the blockage.

Simple sandals and basic adherence to hygiene rules can prevent these infections. Some innovators have introduced simple cheap sandals made from old car tyres that bring protection from injury and prevent hookworm infestations.

The clinical officers in training in South Sudan, supported by generous funding from the Diocese of Salisbury, are more than aware that simple preventative measures can secure the safety and survival of a family. The loss of the wage earner can have a devastating effect on the family in a country with so little security and no social security.

If you would like to contribute to the work of the Sudan Medical Link please send cheques – made out in favour of 'Salisbury DBF (Sudan Medical Link)' – to Ms Angie Wheeler, Diocesan Accountants Office, Church House, Crane Street, Salisbury SP1 2QB.

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