

Gift idea for hiking / walking

The first things that comes to mind for me as a key winter hiking accessory are what I first heard referred to as “icers”. I’ll use that term here, although I also hear them referred to as “crampons”, “ice cleats” or “traction devices” (hopefully we’ll soon get some settled language for these great walking tools!). They are something I would suggest for anyone who wants to hike in winter. Although good tread on hiking shoes or boots often provides adequate traction, wearing icers takes the safety and confidence to a higher level and making walking on snow and ice that much more enjoyable.

Preferences in icers are a personal thing, so what I give you here is just a perspective based on my own experience and observations. The key considerations for me in selecting a pair of icers are: (a) cleats that will grip the surfaces I’ll be walking on; (b) sturdy and stable harnesses; and (c) how easy they are to put on.

Cleats to give traction: Most of my winter walking needs are on soft-surface trails. The cleats on the icers I use (see photo) are fairly long (about 3/8”) steel triangles that are sharp enough to bite into ice, but also serve well in packed, or even loose, snow. While they also are acceptable when I happen to be on snow-packed roads, I would want a shorter cleat if most of my walking was in that setting.

Shorter cleats often have different shapes – they may be pointed but also might be diamond-shaped or sometimes coils. Something with these shorter cleats is what I would look for if walking primarily on hard streets and sidewalks.

Sturdy and stable harnesses: For me this is probably the key consideration. I had an experience once trying to use the wrong icers on a rolling landscape covered in wet ice. The cleats were short, but still could dig into the ice a little if I jammed my feet down. The problem was that when I planted each foot the harness would not stay in place on my boot, but twist sideways, causing the cleats to lose traction.

Easy to put on: I think this is an important consideration because many icers are not easy to put on. The harnesses are some kind of rubber-silicone combination, so they have to be stretched over the shoe or boot. When the weather is very

cold, they become harder to stretch, and putting them on with any ease requires a bench or other seat. I have seen hikers lying in the snow to get icers on their feet and getting help from companions to put them on.

Another approach, as Mary often uses, is to keep the icers on a different pair of hiking shoes, and change her shoes when she needs to walk on snow and ice. So think about this aspect carefully, as it depends on each person's flexibility and preferences. Harnesses with buckles, Velcro or other sturdy closures (rather than the 'stretch' type I have) may be easier to put on.

So for someone who really enjoys walking, this is a gift that could help them enjoy the winter setting a lot more. The increase in confidence and enjoyment when wearing icers has for me been quite striking.