

Buying the Right Shoe for You

by Elizabeth Radley-Walters, BKin, DC

Buying a good shoe is a great investment! Not only can it provide comfort but it can also prevent injury, and enhance performance. Taking the time to find the best fit and understanding what you are buying will benefit you in the long run. To me, shoes and socks are your greatest asset in a workout and your most important piece of equipment.

Walking produces forces up to 3 times your body weight and running can produce forces up to 5 times your body weight which your feet and legs must absorb. If you have a shoe that does not work with your biomechanics you can see that these high repetitive forces will add up very quickly over time and could lead to injury if not discomfort.

Running shoes provide support in a forward motion and provide cushioning in a forward motion that is specific to the impact of running. Cross-trainers and aerobic shoes provide lateral support such as cutting while playing soccer or moving sideways when you are doing step aerobics.

Running shoe manufacturers make **three types of running shoes** to correspond with the three different gait/biomechanic/feet patterns.

1. **Cushioning Shoes:** are for runners who have a neutral gate (they strike on their heel, then land in the middle of their forefoot) or who supinate (they strike on their heel, then roll to the outside of their forefoot). These people generally have rigid feet and need some extra cushion when they run.
2. **Stability Shoes:** are for runners who pronate (they strike on their heel, then roll to the inside of their forefoot). This is the gait pattern of most people. Stability shoes have stiffer foam (usually marked in grey) on the inner side of the running shoe which slows down the speed of the pronation in an attempt to have the person's foot land in a neutral position.
3. **Motion Control Shoes:** are for runners who over-pronate (they strike on their heel, then roll extremely to the inside of their forefoot). These people generally have flat feet which are flexible and need even more stiff foam and even plastic roll bars to slow down the speed of pronation.

A good running shoe these days starts at \$120 dollars and increases depending on the amount of cushioning technology and amount of pronation technology that goes into the shoe. Thus, a higher cushioning shoe or a stability shoe will cost more than a base model cushioning shoe.

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Tips for Shopping:

- Take along your old shoes, the socks you are used to working out in, and orthotics if you require them. This helps the sales person of a specialty running store read your old shoes and put you into the right shoe faster.
- Provide yourself with enough time to consult with the sales person, try on a variety of shoes, and choose the right pair of shoes.
- The sales person will probably ask you: what shoe (brand) has worked for you in the past; how often you will be working out/ running per week; any past injuries you might have suffered; and the terrain you will be working out/ running on.
- Don't just buy a shoe that worked well for someone else- it may not work for you.
- Try on several brands of shoes. Each brand caters to a different shape of foot. Walk and run in the shoe. Test the shoe out.

Tips on Fitting:

- There should be no movement (slipping) in the heel of the shoe when you run. This will just lead to blisters and an improper fit. If there is minor slipping in the heel with running, you can use the extra eyelets at the top of the shoe by either lacing them or using them in combination with a heel-lock-tie to create a more snug fit.
- How the shoe fits in the toe box (front part of the shoe) is personal preference as long as there are no pressure points along the inside of the big toe and outside of the baby toe.
- There should be about $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ the width of your thumb nail from your big toe (or longest toe) to the end of the shoe. This extra space allows your foot to spread out as your ligaments and muscles relax during your workout as well as providing room for any swelling which might also occur during that time. Remember to test both feet as one foot is generally longer than the other. **Buying a shoe that is too small is one of the most frequent mistakes when buying shoes.** You will usually find that your running shoe is at least a half size larger than what you buy in a dress shoe. Most stores have a policy that allows you to try your shoes out on a treadmill, or an indoor track, or at the very least around your home. So, take full advantage of this before you wear them outside. Wearing them around for a couple hours at night when your feet have hit peak swelling will let you know if your shoes are too small to be comfortable when you are racing up Memorial Stairs!

Once you have the right shoe:

- The average life span of a running shoe is 800 Km- this can be awkward in trying to figure out when it is time to get a new pair of shoes. I recommend marking on your calendar when you bought the shoes, then keep track of your average weekly mileage (remember, every time you wear these shoes it adds up- even if you wear them to grocery shop!!). Once you reach 800 Km or one year in the shoes, you will probably notice that your feet, ankles, knees, or back start to hurt more than usual. This is the time to buy a new pair of shoes. You can always take your old shoes into the store to compare the cushioning of your old

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shoes with those of a new pair. Again, buying a new pair of shoes is a great investment as it can prevent potential injuries!

- Never wash your shoes in the washing machine and especially never throw them into the dryer. This can cause the shoe to shrink and all of your hard work in finding the right shoe will be lost. If you need to have your kicks looking clean, use dish washing liquid with a sponge on the outside of the shoe. To dry your shoes, leave the tongues open by loosening the laces and ball up newspaper and stuff your shoes.
- Pairing your shoes with a technical fabric sock can increase the comfort of your new shoes. Technical fabric socks are made with coolmax which is a moisture wicking fabric. In contrast to coolmax, cotton socks are made from a fibrous fiber that absorbs moisture which means that when it gets wet it slouches and can't hold its shape which means friction for your feet- which can then lead to blisters. Coolmax wicks the moisture away from your feet and towards the mesh in your shoes which allows the moisture to escape from your shoe keeping your feet dry and blister free.

“The Journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” Chinese Proverb

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