

Guidelines for Purchasing a Pair of Training Shoes

Footwear is an important item of equipment to prevent injury and provide comfort while walking. The most suitable footwear for this exercise program is within the “running” category. Cross trainers, court, training or walking shoes are not as good a choice for many reasons. To best meet your personal requirements and to address the heel-toe motion of walking or running, choose shoes in the “running” category of footwear only.

An experienced professional can provide a general gait (walking stride) analysis to determine your personal footwear needs. The best merchants with the most expertise are specialty running shops, where staff is generally trained to assess feet for everyone from walkers to long distance runners.

Features of the Running Shoe

The uppers of most running shoes today are seamless (no stitching or rough spots that can cause irritation or blistering) and made of durable lightweight, breathable materials. This is important for fit, breathability and flexibility.



The midsole will look (and feel) different, depending on the degree of support systems present. Different feet require different footwear.

- At one extreme is the low arch, “flat” or highly flexible foot. This foot may require heightened guidance that is often achieved through having two or more different densities of material in the midsole with typically more medial (inside of the foot) density or firmness. This firmness helps to provide the structure and support needed by this foot type.
- At the opposite end of the spectrum is the rigid, high instep, inflexible foot. This foot has very different needs compared to low arched feet. Flexibility and shock absorption are the focus for this type of foot. Often the midsoles of this subcategory are of a single density and generally softer in feel.

Shoes in the running category should come with removable insoles. If they don’t come with removable insoles, they are likely unsuitable. Removable insoles allow for the use of orthotics and also the occasional washing. Insoles are made of light weight foam that will shrink if you wash them in hot water or put them in the dryer. Wash them in cold water by hand and air dry only. **If you wear orthotics**, be sure to have them with you when purchasing footwear and always remove the manufacture’s insole when using an orthotic.

What to Keep in Mind When Purchasing Footwear

A general gait analysis is necessary to determine your foot type and ultimately the best shoes to match them. Have your feet and gait (walking stride) observed by a qualified salesperson. This will determine the subcategory best suited for your personal needs. Call ahead of time and ask if there is someone that can “check my gait.” If they do not offer this service, call another place. Be sure the salesperson watches you walk or run in the shoes you are testing. This will determine if a shoe is over-correcting or under-correcting your gait. Without a gait analysis during the fitting process, it’s just guesswork.

Do not be fooled by a really soft, cushy feel. A softer midsole has less structure. This means that your feet will have to work harder to stabilize your body while walking. Walking for longer periods of time in an extremely soft shoe will inevitably tire you quickly and heighten your susceptibility to injury. Although some feet do require high shock absorption (high arched, rigid foot types), it’s important to make the distinction between cushion and shock absorbency.

How a shoe fits is important. Do not settle for a shoe that is too roomy or too tight fitting. Shoes are readily available in a variety of widths to meet the needs of the widest or narrowest of feet. An ideal fit will be roomy in the toe box. This will allow your toes to spread comfortably when you are in the ‘toe off’ phase of your stride. If a shoe is too snug around your toes, you run the risk of blistering or bruising. Aim for approximately .8 cm or 1/4 inch of space between your longest toe and the end of the shoe. This extra space will also allow for swelling as you exercise, especially on those warmer days.

Shoes will last 6 to 12 months or 800 to 1200km. This will vary according to your foot strike and the conditions they are worn in.

For people with limited mobility

If you have recently experienced a stroke and/or are limited in your mobility, it is important to choose footwear that will not inhibit your rehab. Safety comes first. In this case, walking stride is less important than preventing falls. Where mobility is low and walking aids are used, it’s best to choose footwear that is lightweight, highly flexible and low profile (thin midsole or low to the ground). Tripping hazards will be diminished and your rehab will be less restricted. As you progress in your rehab, become more mobile, walk longer distances or for longer periods of time, you will then want to have a reanalysis of your gait and choose footwear emphasizing those needs as described above.

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