

Athletic Shoes

What is the best shoe for me?

Choosing the right athletic shoe for a sport can be confusing. Each sport has shoes designed for specific demands. Athletic shoes protect the feet from the stresses of a given sport. If you take part in a sport 3 or more times per week, it's likely you need a shoe designed for that sport.

Differences in weight, width, soles, materials, lacing patterns, and cushioning are needed for each sport.

- **Running shoes:** Running shoes should be lightweight and have cushioning to absorb the impact of each stride. Running shoes should also be fitted to how your foot is shaped.
- **Walking shoes:** Walking shoes are more rigid than running shoes and designed to roll from heel to toe.
- **Basketball shoes:** Basketball shoes have a thick stiff sole and must provide more side to side ankle support for sudden starts and stops. Basketball shoes should give support on the inside and the outside of your foot and ankle.
- **Tennis and other racquet sport shoes:** These must also allow for quick side-to-side movements and support the inside and outside of the foot.
- **Field sport shoes:** These usually have cleats, spikes, or studs. Track and field shoes need to meet the needs of the sport, as do other specialty sport shoes, such as shoes for golf or bicycling. The length of the cleats, spikes, or studs is based on the surface, such as grass or artificial turf.

Select a sport-specific shoe based on comfort, fit, and cost. Brand name, special features, and price mean nothing if the shoe does not fit comfortably. Shoes that fit right decrease the chance for injury. This is particularly true for walkers and runners.

Learn about the size and shape of your feet. Shoe manufacturers make shoes specific not only for the demands of the sport, but also for the different foot types.

What about cross training shoes?

Cross trainers combine several features of the different types of shoes designed for different sports. Although sport-specific athletic shoes are generally better for a particular sport, cross-training shoes may be good enough in some cases. Be sure the shoes have good cushioning and shock absorption for the heel and the ball of your foot.

What is my foot type?

It can help to figure out your foot type, which is determined by the way you walk. When you take a step, your foot first contacts the ground on the outside of your heel and then rolls to the inside of your foot. As your weight keeps moving forward and your heel comes off the ground, the foot rolls to the outside again.

Most people don't walk perfectly and tend to put more of their body weight on either the inside or the outside of their foot when they walk.

- If your foot leans too far to the outside when you walk, it is called over-supination. You probably over-supinate if:
 - You have a tendency to walk on the outside of your foot.
 - You have a high arch (even after putting weight on your foot).
 - The bottoms of your shoes get more worn on the outside.
- If your foot leans too far to the inside, it is called over-pronation. You probably over-pronate if:
 - You have a low arch (when putting weight on your foot).
 - Your ankle rolls inward when you walk.
 - You have calluses under your big toe or ball of your foot.
 - The soles of your shoes get more worn on the inside.

Some people just slightly pronate or supinate. If you cannot tell if you pronate or supinate, you probably have what is called a neutral foot.

What should I do when trying on shoes?

Follow these guidelines when trying on shoes:

- Try on shoes at the end of the day or after a workout. Feet have a tendency to swell and this will help you find shoes that are big enough to feel comfortable with this natural swelling.
- Measure both feet while you are standing, with your weight evenly divided between both feet. Feet get larger as you grow older. If you are young and are still growing you should get your feet measured before buying new shoes. If you are an adult your shoe length should not change, but your foot width may change if you gain weight, so you should still get your foot measured every time.
- Wear the same type of sock you will be wearing with the shoes.
- Try on both shoes and walk or jog in them.
- Make sure there is a half inch between your longest toe and the end of the shoe.
- Make sure your heel doesn't slip.
- Make sure the shoe is comfortable right away. There should be no "breaking in" period.

Consider taking a pair of worn shoes to the store when you are looking for new ones. The salesclerk can then see your pattern of wear on the shoes and help you determine which shoes are best for your foot type. People who pronate need shoes with more stability. Supinators need more cushion and flexibility.

Women with wide feet may want to consider buying men's shoes, which are wider through the heel and the ball of the foot. If you have a bunion or hammertoe, look for shoes with a wide toe box so that your toes may move freely.

You may see these terms in running shoe stores to describe different styles of running shoes:

- **Motion control shoes:** These are shoes that are rigid and durable and limit pronation. You should think about buying this style of shoe if you overpronate, you wear orthotics, or you have flat feet.
- **Neutral cushioning shoes:** These are shoes that have cushioning in the heel and front of the foot. You should think about this style if you have a high to normal arch or do not overpronate.
- **Stability control shoe:** These are shoes that have good medial arch support and midsole cushioning. You should think about this style if you have mild to moderate overpronation and need additional support.

How often do I need to replace athletic shoes?

Athletic shoes wear out. Even though they may still feel comfortable, they may not be giving you good support. You may not be able to see the wear and tear. Replace them if the soles are worn or you get new aches and pains.

The midsoles (bottom cushiony part of the shoe) tend to lose their effectiveness after 600 miles or 600 hours of use, depending on how much you weigh and the material used in the shoe. Some runners buy 2 pairs of shoes at a time and alternate them from day to day. This method is fine, but it's also important to note that shoes have a "shelf-life." The midsole will eventually lose its ability to absorb shock, even if the shoes haven't been worn for several years.

Remember, brands and styles change every year, so the shoe that works for you this year might not be the best shoe for you next year.

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