

Healthy Living

Information from the American Chiropractic Association & Dr. Joel Fugleberg

How to Select Athletic Shoes

Too many people choose fashion over function when purchasing athletic shoes, not realizing that poor-fitting shoes can lead to pain throughout the body. Because footwear plays such an important role in the function of bones and joints—especially for runners and other athletes—choosing the right shoe can help prevent pain in your back, hips, knees, and feet.

Unfortunately, there is no such thing as the very best athletic shoe—every pair of feet is different, every shoe has different features, and overall comfort is a very personal decision. For this reason, it is recommended that you first determine your foot type: normal, flat, or high-arched.

The Normal Foot

Normal feet have a normal-sized arch and will leave a wet footprint that has a flare, but shows the forefoot and heel connected by a broad band. A normal foot lands on the outside of the heel and rolls slightly inward to absorb shock.

Best shoes: Stability shoes with a slightly curved shape.

The Flat Foot

This type of foot has a low arch and leaves a print that looks like the whole sole of the foot. It usually indicates an overpronated foot—one that strikes on the outside of the heel and rolls excessively inward (pronates). Over time, this can cause overuse injuries.

Best shoes: Motion-control shoes or high-stability shoes with firm midsoles. These shoes should be fairly resistant to twisting or bending. Stay away from highly cushioned, highly curved shoes, which lack stability features.



The High-Arched Foot

The high-arched foot leaves a print showing a very narrow band—or no band at all—between the forefoot and the heel. A curved, highly arched foot is generally supinated or underpronated. Because the foot doesn't pronate enough, usually it's not an effective shock absorber.

Best shoes: Cushioned shoes with plenty of flexibility to encourage foot motion. Stay away from motion-control or stability shoes, which reduce foot mobility.

When determining your foot type, consult with your doctor of chiropractic. He or she can help determine your specific foot type, assess your gait, and then suggest the best shoe match.

The Role of Orthotics

Feet are to the skeletal system what a foundation is to a house. If a structural abnormality exists in the foot, the body must compensate—often to the detriment of other areas such as the legs or low back. Orthotics are custom-designed shoe inserts that are intended to correct an abnormal, or irregular, walking pattern.

Although commonly referred to as “arch supports,” orthotics actually alter the angle at which the foot strikes the ground, improving the way your feet function, and in many cases reducing pain.

Shoe Purchasing Tips

Consider the following tips before you purchase your next pair of athletic shoes:

- **Match the shoe to the activity.** Select a shoe specific for the sport in which you will participate. Running shoes are primarily made to absorb shock as the heel strikes the ground. In contrast, tennis shoes provide more side-to-side stability. Walking shoes allow the foot to roll and push off naturally during walking, and they usually have a fairly rigid arch, a well-cushioned sole, and a stiff heel support for stability.
- **If possible, shop at a specialty store.** It’s best to shop at a store that specializes in athletic shoes. Employees at these stores are often trained to recommend a shoe that best matches your foot type (shown above) and stride pattern.
- **Shop late in the day.** If possible, shop for shoes at the end of the day or after a workout when your feet are generally at their largest. Wear the type of socks you usually wear during exercise, and if you use orthotic devices for postural support, make sure you wear them when trying on shoes.
- **Have your feet measured every time.** It’s important to have the length and width of both feet measured every time you shop for shoes, since foot size often changes with age and most people have 1 foot that is larger than the other. Also, many podiatrists suggest that you measure your foot while standing in a weight-bearing position because the foot elongates and flattens when you stand, affecting the measurement and the fit of the shoe.

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- **Make sure the shoe fits correctly.** Choose shoes for their fit, not by the size you’ve worn in the past. The shoe should fit with an index finger’s width between the end of the shoe and the longest toe. The toe box should have adequate room and not feel tight. The heel of your foot should fit snugly against the back of the shoe without sliding up or down as you walk or run. If possible, keep the shoe on for 10 minutes to make sure it remains comfortable.

How long do shoes last?

Once you have purchased a pair of athletic shoes, don’t run them into the ground. While estimates vary as to when the best time to replace old shoes is, most experts agree that between 300 and 500 miles is optimal. In fact, most shoes should be replaced even before they begin to show signs of moderate wear. Once shoes show wear, especially in the cushioning layer called the midsole, they also begin to lose their shock absorption. Failure to replace worn shoes is a common cause of injuries like shin splints, heel spurs, and plantar fasciitis. ■

References

1. *Runner’s World United Kingdom*, <http://www.runnersworld.co.uk/>
2. Stephen Pribuit, DPM, past president of the American Academy of Podiatric Sports Medicine
3. American Academy of Podiatric Sports Medicine, www.apma.org



Dr. Joel Fugleberg is a chiropractor, fitness advocate, author, and health & wellness speaker in St. Paul, MN. His mission is to empower others to take a proactive approach in their health, through the use of chiropractic and other natural strategies, to achieve optimal function and wellness. With his background, he has helped thousands reach a higher level of health in his community.

If you would like to schedule a consultation, or to have Dr. Joel speak at your organization or event, he can be reached at the contact info listed below.

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