

If the shoe fits: How to find your best running shoe

By Amy Wheeler, AT, ATC

Many of the athletes that make their way into our training room with complaints of leg or foot pain are walking in with a pair of worn out or ill fitting running shoes. Here are some tips on when to retire those old sneakers and how to replace them with a properly fit running shoe.

“I’ve only had these shoes a year, how can they be worn out?”

When is it time for a new pair of running shoes?

- Even a good pair of running shoes needs to be replaced every 300-500 miles.
- Look for treads that are starting to smooth.
- Watch for signs of uneven tread wear. Are the wear patterns on the bottom of your shoes different?

Try taking your shoes off and setting them on a table. When you look at them from behind do both heels have even contact with the table? When you nudge them with your finger do they rock back and forth? If they rock or look warped it's time for a new pair.

- Watch for the upper (the mesh portion) of your shoe pulling away from the bottom foam or rubber section of your shoes. Any tears or separation at these points will affect how a shoe supports your foot.

Tip: If you are running back to back days consider rotating between two or more pairs of shoes. The foam in the midsole and heel needs about 24 hrs to fully rebound and give their proper support and shock absorption. This is especially important when moisture is involved or during ‘two-a-day’ training sessions.

Why do I need to be fit for a pair of running shoes?

Everyone has different needs from a running shoe based upon several factors including body weight, the type of arch (or lack of), amount of pronation, gait pattern, and even age. A knowledgeable fitter will evaluate your foot and match it with a specific type of shoe.

“I found these on sale at the mall in my favorite color!”

How to spot a good running shoe store

- Ask your school's certified athletic trainer (ATC), they should be able to give you a few stores that have a knowledgeable and reputable staff.
- A good shoe fitter should discuss your running habits with you and look at your current shoes.
- After looking at your foot and watching your gait, a good fitter will take the time to educate you on the type of foot you have and important features that your running shoes should have.
- A good fit should take at least 30-45 minutes. You should try on more than one pair of shoes, making sure to try on both shoes, properly lace them and ideally run and walk in them for several minutes.



1. Flat/Pronated foot = Motion Control shoe
2. Normal/Neutral foot = Stability shoe
3. High/Supinated foot = Neutral/Cushioned shoe

Getting the Perfect Fit

- Shop in the afternoon. Feet will swell with exercise and also toward the end of the day.
- Don't pick a shoe for its looks. The color won't seem to matter as much if you are limping from an ill fitting shoe.
- Bring the socks you run in, preferably a wool or synthetic sock that wicks moisture and combats against friction that may lead to blisters.
- The toe box (the front of the shoe) should be roomy. There should be almost a half-inch between your longest toe and the shoe allowing you to wiggle your toes freely.
- The heel should be snug but not tight. This is where much of the shoe's stability comes from. Too tight and you might end up with blisters.
- Does the shoe match your foot? The shoe should mimic your foot anatomy. Notice where the shoe naturally bends, does it line up with the ball of your foot? The widest portion of the shoe should match the widest part of your foot. If any portion of your foot spills over an edge, you need a wider size.

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