



# HOW TO SELECT ATHLETIC SHOES

## HOW DO I PICK ATHLETIC SHOES?

Gym shoes, sport shoes, sneakers – whatever you call them, proper-fitting athletic shoes can enhance performance and prevent injuries. Follow these fitting tips from [foot and ankle orthopaedic surgeons](#) when purchasing your next pair.



- **Purchase shoes from a specialty store, if possible.** The staff will provide valuable input on the type of shoe needed for your sport as well as help with proper fitting.
- **Try on athletic shoes after a workout or run and at the end of the day** when your feet are at their largest. Fit your shoe to your largest foot.
- **Wear the same type of sock** that you would wear for that sport.
- **Re-lace the shoes.** You should begin at the farthest eyelets and apply even pressure as you create a crisscross lacing pattern to the top of the shoe.

- **Check the fit.** When the shoe is on your foot, you should be able to freely wiggle your toes. Make sure you can fit at least one thumb between your longest toe and the end of the shoe's toe box. The shoes should be comfortable as soon as you try them on. Don't plan on them fitting better after "breaking them in."
- **Walk or run a few steps in the shoes** and make sure they are comfortable.
- **Check the heel.** There should be a firm grip of the shoe to your heel and your heel should not slip as you walk or run.
- **Consider a sport-specific shoe.** This may be necessary if you participate in a sport 3 or more times a week.
- **Change shoes regularly.** After 300-500 miles of running or 300 hours of exercise, the cushioning material in a shoe is usually worn down and it's time to replace the shoes.

## What Type of Athletic Shoe Should I Get?

Athletic shoes can vary in design, material, and weight. These differences have been developed to protect the areas of the feet that are most stressed during a particular athletic activity.

- **Running, training, and walking shoes**, including shoes for hiking, jogging, and exercise walking.
- **Court sport shoes**, including shoes for tennis, basketball, and volleyball. Most court sports require the body to move forward, backward, and side-to-side. As a result, most court sport shoes are subjected to heavy abuse.
- **Field sport shoes**, such as those for soccer, football, and baseball. These shoes are cleated, studded, or spiked. The spike and stud formations vary from sport to sport, but generally there are replaceable or detachable cleats, spikes, or studs affixed onto nylon soles.
- **Track and field sport shoes** that often come in many models to meet the specific needs and training styles of individual runners.
- **Specialty sport shoes**, including shoes for golf, aerobic dancing, and bicycling.

- **Outdoor sport shoes**, including shoes used for recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, and boating.

## What Should I Look for in an Athletic Shoe?

### Running Shoes

Conventional thinking suggests that a good running shoe should have ample cushioning to absorb shock, but there are advocates for minimalist running shoes that have almost no cushioning. No data exist to say which type of shoe is better.

If you choose a cushioned shoe, look for overall shock absorption, flexibility, control, and stability in the heel counter area (a hard insert used to reinforce the heel cup of a shoe), as well as lightness and good traction. These features may help prevent shin splints, tendinitis, **heel pain**, **stress fractures**, and other overuse injuries.

### Walking Shoes

If walking is your activity of choice, look for a lightweight shoe with extra shock absorption in the heel of the shoe and especially under the ball of the foot. This will help reduce heel pain as well as burning and tenderness in the ball of the foot (**metatarsalgia**). A shoe with a slightly rounded or rocker sole (the entire part of the shoe that sits below the foot) also helps to encourage the natural roll of the foot during the walking motion. You should also look for a comfortable soft upper (the entire part of the shoe that covers the foot) and smooth tread (the part of the sole that touches the ground).

### Aerobic Shoes

Shoes for aerobic conditioning should be lightweight to prevent foot fatigue and have extra shock absorption in the sole beneath the ball of the foot, where the most stress occurs. If possible, work out on a soft surface (e.g., a carpet).

### Tennis Shoes

Tennis players need a shoe that supports the foot during quick side-to-side movements or shifts in weight. Look for a shoe that provides stability on the inside and outside of the foot. Flexibility in the sole beneath the

ball of the foot allows repeated, quick forward movements for a fast reaction at the net. On soft courts, wear a softer soled shoe that allows better traction. On hard courts, you want a sole with greater tread.

### **Basketball Shoes**

If basketball is your sport, choose a shoe with a thick, stiff sole. This gives extra stability when running on the court. A high-top shoe may provide added support but won't necessarily decrease the risk of ankle sprain or injury.

### **Cross Trainers**

Cross-training shoes, or cross trainers, combine several of the above features so that you can participate in more than one sport. A good cross trainer should have both flexibility in the front of the foot needed for running and lateral control necessary for aerobics or tennis.

You do not necessarily need a different pair of shoes for every sport in which you participate. Generally, you should wear sport-specific shoes for sports you play more than 3 times a week.

You may need a special shoe to address specific foot and ankle problems. For example, if your ankles turn easily, you may need to wear a shoe with a wide heel. If you have trouble with shin splints, you may need a shoe with better shock absorption. Talk to your foot and ankle orthopaedic surgeon if you have concerns.

### **Other Design Features**

Special features in construction will make athletic shoes more comfortable as well as help prevent injury:

- A **slip-lasted shoe** is made by sewing together the upper like a moccasin and then gluing it to the sole. This lasting method makes for a lightweight and flexible shoe with no torsional rigidity.
- A **board-lasted shoe** has the "upper" leather or canvas sewn to a cardboard-like material. A person with flat feet (pes planus) feels more support and finds improved control in this type of shoe.
- A **combination-lasted shoe** combines advantages of both other shoes. It is slip-lasted in the front and board-lasted in the back. These shoes give good heel control but remain flexible in the front

under the ball of the foot. They are good for a wide variety of foot types.

## What If I Develop Foot Problems?

If you begin to develop foot or ankle problems, simple adjustments in the shoes may relieve the symptoms. Many of these devices are available without prescription.

- A **heel cup** provides an effective way to alleviate pain beneath the heel (such as **plantar fasciitis**). Made of plastic or rubber, the heel cup is designed to support the area around the heel while relieving pressure beneath the tender spot.
- A **metatarsal pad** can help relieve pain beneath the ball of the big toe (**sesamoiditis**) or beneath the ball of the other toes (**metatarsalgia**). Made of a felt material or firm rubber, the pad has adhesive on its flat side. Fixed to the insole behind the tender area (closer to the heel or further from the toes), the pad shares pressure normally placed on the ball of the foot. This relieves pressure beneath the tender spot.
- An **arch support (orthosis)** can help treat pain in the arch of the foot. Made of many types of materials, arch supports can be placed in a shoe after removing the insole (the removable inner sole) that comes with the shoe.
- **Custom arch supports** may be necessary for chronic (long-term) and complicated problems, including severe flat foot, high arches, shin splints, Achilles tendinitis, and turf toe. Custom arch supports are specially designed inserts that concentrate relief on a particular area while supporting other areas.

Talk to your **foot and ankle orthopaedic surgeon** if you are experiencing foot or ankle problems. Working with your surgeon along with podiatrists and orthotists (specialists trained to make and modify shoe inserts) will ensure you get the right shoe for the best possible treatment.

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