

Footwear – Tips on Proper Fitting, Care, and Usage

Most people would agree that, like having a good mattress, good shoes are important to one's well being, since many hours are spent bearing weight on them. Yet people frequently buy ill-fitted shoes for fashion, price, or other reasons, and then keep wearing the shoes till they are worn out, because they have just become "broken in."

Foot pain can be prevented or reduced from buying properly fitted shoes and proper footwear usage. Following are tips when purchasing shoes, aimed more for those buying running or exercise shoes, but also practical for the general population too. Also, tips on proper shoe care and use are presented.

Tips for purchasing shoes

Shoe fitting

- Try on shoes in the afternoon or end of the day, or after a run or workout, since feet tend to become larger as the day progresses, by as much as a full size by the end of the day.
- Wear running socks when buying a new pair of running or exercise shoes.
- Always relace shoes being tried on.
- Stand when determining proper shoe fit.
- There should be approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of space between the end of your longest toe and the end of the toe box, or roughly your thumb width sideways.
- One should be able to wiggle one's toes upwards.
- One should be able to squeeze a ripple in the shoe between the 1st and 5th toes, signifying adequate space in the toe box.
- Twist the shoe along its length to check for excessive flexibility.
- Squeeze the heel counter to check for firmness. It should be firm and difficult to pinch since it stabilizes and prevents slippage at the heel.
- Bend the front part of the shoe upwards. It should bend in the area of the toebox. If the shoe bends in the area of the laces or midfoot, it is excessively flexible.
- For running shoes, a padded collar around the top with a cut out for the Achilles tendon allows one to lace the shoe tightly.
- Since one shoe may fit differently than the other, try them both on. Buy the size based on the larger foot.
- When lacing up the shoe, the width of the lace holes should be the same all the way to the top. If not, it may be not the correct size.
- One should know the type of foot one has when purchasing shoes, whether one has flat feet, high arches, or neutral feet. For example, a flat-footed person needs a motion control shoe, which is a stiffer, less flexible shoe to help decrease the excess motion inward seen with this type of foot. On the other hand someone with high arches needs a well-cushioned shoe to improve shock absorption since this person has a more rigid, less forgiving foot. For a more in-depth look at footwear based foot types, please refer to McKinley Health Center's handout "Foot Types and Proper Footwear."

Other considerations

- Laced on shoes give a better fit than slip-ons.
- Running shoes should be comfortable from Day 1. They shouldn't have to be "broken in."
- If one participates in an exercise or sports specific activity, then a sport specific shoe is preferred.
- With age the feet get fatter and longer, the feet and ankles become stiffer, and the arches tend to flatten.

Shoe use and care

- Running shoes should be retired after 400-600 miles since the midsole begins to break down.
- For those who walk as exercise, shoes should be replaced roughly every 6 months. For normal use, sneakers should be replaced every year.
- Midsoles have a memory of 24-36 hours, so if one is running every day, the midsoles may not have time to spring back completely by the next run. Therefore, it is better to wear a different pair of shoes on alternate days.
- New shoes will break down over time, generally a year or two, if they are not worn.
- Machine washing and drying are very hard on shoes. If necessary, clean with dishwashing liquid, and then let the shoes air dry.

- Don't use your other foot against a shoe's heel counter to take off your shoe.
- Try not to run in wet shoes, since the cushioning may be compromised.

References

"What Every Runner Should Know about Shoes," Physician & Sportsmedicine; Jan, 2005; Vol. 33 Issue 1, p23
American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society Web site at: www.aofas.org
American Podiatric Medical Association Web site at: www.apma.org

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns,
or need to make an appointment, please call: **Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700**

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information
in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: <http://www.mckinley.uiuc.edu>