

A Guide to Properly Fitting Athletic Shoes

The importance of proper fitting shoes

Wearing athletic shoes that are comfortable and fit your feet can help prevent injuries such as blisters and calluses. Athletic shoes that fit properly may also help you stick with your exercise program.

Guidelines for properly fitting athletic shoes

When shopping for walking shoes, remember these tips. They can help you get the comfort, style, and support you need.

1. If you need special help and advice, **go to a store that specializes in athletic shoes.**
2. **Shop late in the day when your feet are biggest.** The size of your feet can increase up to half a shoe size during the course of a single day of standing or walking because of swelling.
3. **Try on shoes with the socks you will exercise in.**
4. **Have both feet measured in width and length.** For most people, both feet are not the same shoe size.
5. **If the shoe does not feel right when you try it on, do not buy it.**
6. **Walk around the store to check for comfort and cushioning.** You should try to simulate athletic movements of a particular activity to determine if the shoe will perform properly. Walk around in the shoes, jog in place, jump around (try to do these things on the tile and not just carpeting).
7. **Stand on your tiptoes to make sure that your heel does not come out of the shoe.**
8. **Make sure that the shoe bends easily under the ball of your foot.** Make sure there is no tightness or rubbing, and that the shoe's arch support matches up with your foot's arch.
9. After lacing, **make sure that the lace holes on either side of the shoe are at least one inch apart.** If they are too close, you will not have enough room to adjust the laces. If they are more than two inches apart, the shoes may be too tight.
10. **Make sure the front of the shoe is wide enough so that your toes can spread, and make sure your longest toe is about the width of a thumbnail from the end of the shoe** by pressing down with your thumb.
11. **If you have some old athletic shoes, bring them with you.** Most shoe professionals can determine your gait based on the wear of your old shoes.



Personalizing Your Shoe Selection

Type of Shoe: Ask the trained personnel at the shoe store what type of shoe is best for your exercise routine.

- If you regularly participate in weight training, stair climbing, and ride a stationary bike, a cross-training shoe would be most appropriate.
- Walking shoes are stiffer than running shoes; running shoes are more flexible, with extra cushioning to handle greater impact. If you do both activities, get a pair for each one.

Learn your foot shape

• Lay a brown grocery bag flat on a hard surface. Get your bare feet wet then walk across the paper.

• If your footprint shows the entire sole of your foot with little to no curve on the inside -- or if your shoes show the most wear on the inside edge -- it means you've got low arches or flat feet and tend toward overpronation -- meaning your feet roll inward. Overpronation can create extra wear on the outside heel and inside forefoot. You'll want a shoe with a motion-control feature and maximum support.

• If the footprint shows only a portion of your forefoot and heel with a narrow connection between the two -- or if your shoes wear out mostly on the outside edge -- you have high arches and tend to underpronate (also called supinate), meaning your feet roll outward. Underpronation causes wear on the outer edge of the heel and the little toe. Look for a cushioned shoe with a soft midsole.

• You have a neutral arch if your footprint has a distinct curve along the inside and your shoes wear out uniformly. Look for a "stability" shoe, which has the right mix of cushioning and support.

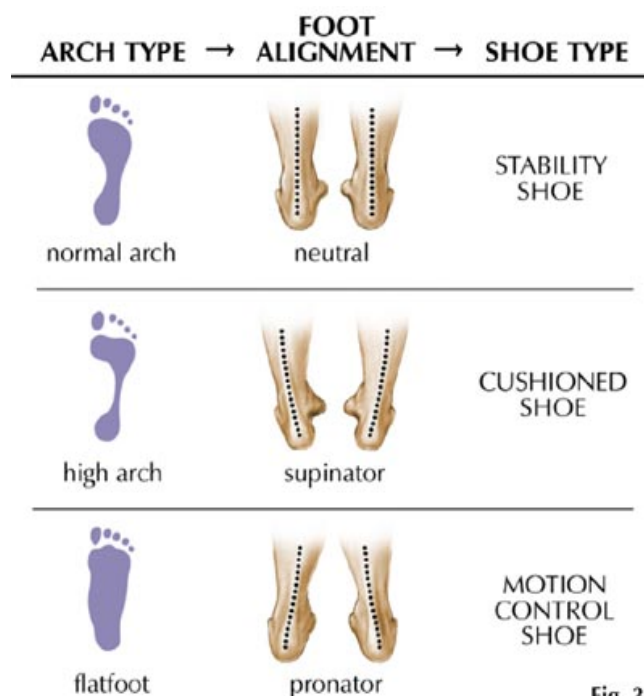


Fig. 3

Important Reminder: You should buy new shoes about every three to six months or 300 to 500 exercising miles. Since the midsole usually wears out first, you should not use the outer sole as an indicator of use. Generally, a single pair of shoes worn at least four days per week for any fitness related activity should be replaced every four months.

*Resources

- Estrella Mountain Community College, Proper Footwear
- Michigan WISEWOMAN Program, Buying Walking Shoes
- WebMD, 10 Tips for Choosing Athletic Shoes
- Mayo Clinic, Walking shoes: Features and fit that keep you moving