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These Shoes Were Made for Running

On the surface, running and walking appear to be free: You can do them anywhere, anytime, and for as long as you want without any associated costs. But that's not quite true. Your shoes are the single most important item for running and walking. If you don't have the proper footwear, your ability to reach your goals and progress in your routine can be compromised. When it comes to shoes, one type does not fit all. Whether you wear a minimalist shoe or a more supportive shoe, you need to invest in the proper shoe for successful exercise.

When I am evaluating a runner or walker for an injury or discussing their exercise program, the most common question is, "What is the best shoe to for me to wear?" There is not a simple answer. Picking out a shoe can be overwhelming. If you type running/walking shoes into a search engine, you'll get almost 4.4 billion results. This only increases the anxiety that you may have in choosing the right shoe. There is also the language of shoe anatomy, including toe box, saddle, upper, insole, outsole, toe spring, heel-toe drop, ankle collar, pronation and supination. All of this can be confusing. Shoe companies invest millions or more into the science of shoes, with every company vying for your feet.

Here are some tips to improve your understanding, which should help you select the proper pair.

Purchase a shoe for its fit and function, not for looks. Sure, it would be great to have a Lamborghini, but that is not exactly a practical choice. The same thing is true for shoes. Fancy, high-priced shoes aren't necessarily the best ones for you. The most important thing is a proper fit. Here are a few essential points in helping to find a proper fit:

- **Snug fit on the heel:** Look for a shoe that supports your heel without rubbing on your Achille's tendon or putting too much pressure on your heel bone. Also, make sure there is no excessive movement of the shoe at the heel that will cause too much friction and result in blisters.
- **Proper size toe box:** Your toes should be supported in the shoe but not too crowded. Your toes should not rub against the tip of the shoe or be squeezed together too tightly. Typically, you want a thumb's width between the tip of your toes and the front of the shoe.
- **Flexibility:** Your foot will bend as you run. Make certain that the shoe has a level of flexibility (without too much stiffness) to prevent pinching and abnormal rubbing on your foot or ankle.

Try on shoes later in the day. There is less swelling in your legs and feet first thing in the morning. Throughout the day, fluids mobilize in the body and tend to pool in your feet and ankles. Your shoes will fit differently in the morning than they do in the evening. Try on shoes in the afternoon or evening when there tends to be slightly more swelling in your feet and ankles.

Make sure you measure both of your feet every time you purchase shoes. Your feet are always changing. Even if you are purchasing the same brand of shoes, measure your feet prior to purchasing a shoe. And try on both shoes, not just one, to ensure the proper fit.

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Replace your shoes regularly. If you are a serious runner or walker, your shoes will only last so long. Over the lifespan of the shoe, the components, integrity and cushioning will break down. Wear can lead to changes in your running mechanics, which can lead to aches, pains and even injuries. I recommend that you replace your shoes every 300-500 miles. Depending on your mileage, this translates into every three to six months, or sooner if you see abnormal wear patterns on the sole or break down of the fabric.

Only use your shoes for exercise. The more you wear your shoes, the quicker they will break down and wear out. It is important to have a pair of shoes that you only use for exercise. Also, make sure you always untie your laces when you take your shoes off. Failing to untie them can cause rubbing on the heel that will break down the fabric or result in abnormal stretching of the shoe.

Be consistent with a model of shoe that works for you. If you find a shoe that really works well for you, then stick with it. This way, you know the feel of the shoes and how you are going to perform in them. It is also a good idea to purchase multiple pairs of shoes at one time so that you can slowly transition out of an old pair and into the new pair, which can help with the break-in period.

Have your running/walking gait evaluated. Running stores have great customer service representatives who have been trained to fit you for the proper running/walking shoe. They can evaluate the anatomy of your foot and monitor your running/walking gait to find the proper fit. Take a pair of older shoes with you when you shop for a new pair. They can evaluate the wear patterns on your shoe to determine if you need more support in certain areas.

Purchase your shoes from a place that allows free returns or exchanges. You can buy a shoe that you feel is a great fit, but after a few miles or days you may start to notice that you are having aches and pains, or the fit is not as good as you thought. You have made a significant investment in your shoes, and you want the proper fit. If the place where you purchased the shoes offers guaranteed satisfaction and free returns, you can exchange or return the shoes until you find the proper fit. If you purchase online, make sure you also check return shipping costs and restocking fees, as these costs can add up.

Don't wear brand new shoes on race day. You typically want a break-in period of two to three weeks before a race. This way, you know that you will have the proper fit and can make changes, if needed, which will decrease the chances of injury and pain.

No matter if your next race is the Amway River Bank Run on October 23 or another race between now and then, make sure you're wearing the right shoe that day – and every day you work out. If you have questions about shoes, ask your sports medicine physician or local expert at a running store.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding an injury or pain, please reach out to one of our experienced sports medicine physicians at Corewell Health Medical Group Orthopedics at (616) 267- 8860. You can also find more information about our orthopedic program and providers on our [website](#).
