

Selecting the Proper Shoe

Why is selecting the proper shoe so important?

Selecting the proper shoe is very important; many sports related overuse injuries can be attributed to incorrect footwear. In choosing the correct shoes you need to consider a variety of factors, including:

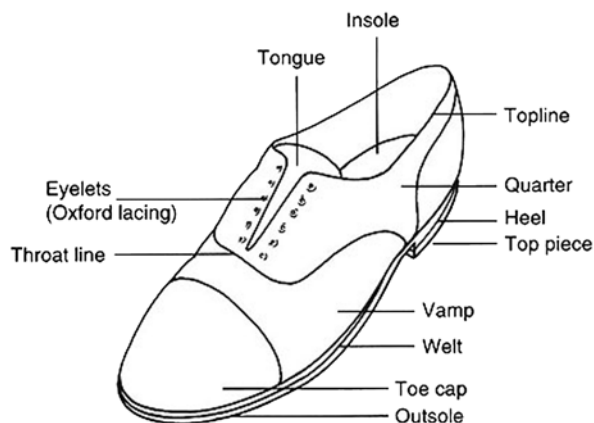
- The activity they will be used for.
- Your foot type.
- Existing foot problems.

In choosing the correct shoes, you can reduce the risk of sports related injuries and also ensure you are participating to the best of your ability.

Shoe Anatomy

As a general rule a shoe will emphasize either stability or cushioning. Therefore a shoe that is softer and more cushioned will offer less support and stability than a firmer shoe. In order to make an informed decision on appropriate footwear, it is good to have an understanding about the parts of a shoe and how they impact on your feet. When selecting a shoe you should consider these parts:

- toe box
- midsole
- counter
- last.



Toe box

This is the front part of the shoe that accommodates for your toes. The width and height of the toe box vary among different brands. When selecting your shoe, ensure the toe box is both wide and deep enough to accommodate for toe deformities such as bunions and hammertoes as these conditions can be irritated by toe boxes that are too small. The upper of the shoe needs to allow the foot to breathe. Leather is the best material as it allows air exchange through the pores, while other synthetics do not. This prevents moisture build up on the feet.

Midsole

The midsole of the shoe is usually made from a material known as EVA. This provides both shock absorption and cushioning for the foot. Many sports shoes will also include extra shock absorbing materials such as air and gel inserts in the midsole.

Twist the front and back of the shoe in opposite directions. You should not feel an excessive amount of movement. This means the shoe should provide stability.

Make sure the sole of the shoe flexes in the correct spot. To check this, bend the sole of the shoe in an upward direction. The shoe should bend at the ball of the foot, but not in the middle of the shoe. This means that the shoe will have the correct flexibility during the walking cycle, while still retaining enough stability and support for the arch.

Counter

The counter is the area of the shoe that wraps around the back of the heel. This provides control and stability for the foot. Push the heel counter, back of heel inwards. It should retain its shape and should not collapse. This increases the control of foot movement throughout walking.

Last

This is the form around which the shoe is built. The shape of the last determines the functional characteristics of the shoe and can be classified as being straight, semi curved or curved.

- **Straight last**—is filled in on the inside part of the shoe, which increases the shoe's stability and allows it to fit a flat arch better.
- **Semi curved last**—this is designed for the average foot and has a small curve on the inside of the shoe. Most shoes are built on a semi curved last.
- **Curved last**—is designed for those people with higher than normal arches. The outside part of these shoes is wider, providing more forefoot stability.

Depending on your weight, foot type and the activities shoes are used for, you should expect your shoes to last three to five months. Although a shoe may not look worn out, often the midsole or the counter of the shoe will have begun to break down, decreasing the cushioning and support of the shoe.



Curved Last



Straight Last



Semi Curved Last

How do you ensure you have the correct shoe fit?

The most important consideration when choosing shoes is the fit. If the shoe does not fit correctly or feels uncomfortable, then it will not function as it was designed to. When trying on shoes, follow these simple guidelines to ensure you get the correct fit.

- When trying on shoes, always wear a similar weight sock and any additional devices such as orthoses you plan to wear with the shoes.
- Leave one finger's width between your longest toe and the end of the shoe. Ensure the counter of the shoe is supportive enough so that the heel does not slide up and down excessively.
- Shop for shoes later in the day, as your feet tend to swell when standing or exercising.
- Make sure you try on both shoes, fully laced and walk or run around the store to ensure comfort and fit. It is also a good idea to wear the shoes at home on carpet for a few hours before wearing them outside to ensure they are comfortable.
- Ensure the shoe has an adequate restraining mechanism. The shoe needs to be fixed to the foot, through laces, a buckle or strap. Otherwise there is too much movement of the foot during the walking cycle.

Please note: The information in this document should not be used as a substitute for podiatric or medical attention.