

# Fit Facts

American  
Council on  
Exercise

## SNEAKER SAVVY

If you've tried to buy a pair of athletic shoes recently, you probably realize that the canvas sneakers of the past have been replaced by high-tech, state-of-the-art athletic gear. Consumers are faced with so many options that the task of choosing a pair of shoes has become increasingly complicated and confusing, not to mention expensive. By attaining a good working knowledge of athletic footwear, you will be less likely to fall for the latest gimmick or be coerced into spending above your budget.

### Know What You Need

When shopping for athletic shoes, the first step is deciding what type you need. If you engage in a specific activity 2-3 times/week, such as running, walking, tennis, basketball or aerobics, you'll want a shoe designed specifically for that sport. Multi-purpose shoes such as cross trainers may be a good alternative for those who want to combine several sports or activities, such as cardio and weight training, in a single workout.

The next step is getting a good fit. Remember, no matter how popular a shoe is or how good it may look, it won't do you any good if it doesn't support your unique foot or causes blisters.

### Guidelines For Buying Shoes

Ideally you should look for a specialty athletic shoe store with a good reputation in your community. Their sales staff are more likely to be knowledgeable.

When purchasing shoes for a specific sport or fitness activity, consider your foot type. People with high-arched feet tend to require greater shock absorption than those with average feet. High-arched (cavus) feet also suffer from lateral instability and are more prone to ankle sprains. Conversely, people with low-arched ("flat") feet require shoes with less cushioning but greater support and heel control.

Test the shoes for basic stability:

- Grab the shoe at the ball and heel. Bend the shoe from front to back. The shoe should bend right near the ball of the foot, because that's your foot's natural hinge point.
- At the heel of the shoe, find the "heel counter" a stiff cup sewn into the back of the shoe to provide heel support. Squeeze this cup into the shoe. It should be very stiff and not collapse inward easily.



### FIT TIPS

1. Get fitted for footwear at the end of the day, when foot size is at its maximum. It's not unusual for an individual's foot to increase one-half a shoe size during the course of a single day.
2. Allow 1/2 inch, or the width of your index finger, between the end of your longest toe and the end of the shoe. If one foot is larger than the other, buy the larger size.
3. The ball of the foot should match the widest part of the shoe and you should have plenty of room for your toes to wiggle without experiencing slippage in the heel. (Hint: Women tend to have a narrower heel in relation to their foot size than men, so try on several models to find the right style).
4. Wear the same weight of socks that you intend to use during activity. Socks with a high cotton content retain moisture and cause blisters more easily. Look for socks that are made with synthetic fibers such as acrylic, polyester or Coolmax.®

### Some Final Considerations

Athletic shoes no longer require a break-in period. However, they will lose their cushioning after three to six months of regular use (or 350-500 miles of running). It is important to be aware of when your shoes need to be replaced because, if they are no longer absorbing the pounding and jarring action of the sport, you are more likely to sustain knee and ankle injuries.

A final consideration when buying athletic shoes is price. It is possible to spend anywhere from \$19.99 for no-name brands to more than \$170 for Reebok's or Nike's latest technological wonder. A high price doesn't always guarantee the right fit or features. You can find a pair that provides excellent support, cushioning and fit in the middle price range.

Finally, just because a friend says that a certain model is great doesn't mean it's a great shoe for YOU. Try out several pairs and simulate your activity on a hard surface to determine the kind of support and cushioning provided. Then you and your feet will be ready to go!

For more fit tips and athletic shoe recommendations: American Association of Podiatric Sports Medicine. [www.aapsm.or/runshoe.html](http://www.aapsm.or/runshoe.html)

*If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at [www.acefitness.org](http://www.acefitness.org) and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts.*

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