

Buying a pair of Running Shoes

So, it's looking as though the weather might be improving, and you might just be thinking about getting out for a walk, jog, or a run. Will last year's trainers be OK? – maybe, maybe not.... or maybe you don't have any training shoes and are thinking of taking up running. This month I'll try to shed a little light on what might be appropriate for running in. First thing's first, there's no single 'best shoe' – everyone has different needs (and preferences). Many things – how you run, your weight, where you run, and the shape of your feet - mean that one person's ideal shoe can be someone else's nightmare.

Training shoes are designed in three main categories: stability, cushioned, and motion control, and they are categorised mainly by how you run. A competent shoe retailer will look at how you walk/run and be able to recommend an appropriate shoe, but it's worth doing a quick test to give you an idea. This is known as the 'Wet Footprint Test', and works by putting a wet footprint (bare foot) down on dry floor or a piece of paper (I find tiled floors work well, but be careful not to slip). Have a look at the diagrams below and decide which foot type you have.



Normal Foot has a normal arch and will leave a footprint that shows the forefoot and heel connected. When running you'll land on the outside of the heel and roll inwards slightly to absorb shock. If you stand the shoe on a flat surface it won't lean to one side or the other. This foot type is biomechanically efficient, and suits stability shoes.



Flat Foot has a low arch and leaves a print which resembles the whole foot. It usually means that you land on the outside of the heel and roll inwards (pronation) more than normal. This can cause overuse injuries, and you should look for motion control shoes. If you stand the shoe on a flat surface it will show a slight inward lean.



High-Arched Foot leaves a print showing a very narrow band (or no band at all) between the forefoot and the heel. A highly arched foot is often supinated (rolled outwards) or underpronated, which means it's *not* an effective shock absorber. Look for cushioned (or 'neutral') shoes with flexibility to encourage foot motion. If you stand the shoe on a flat surface it will show a slight outwards lean.

Buying Shoes

1. Go to a running shop. Take your current running shoes and socks (and orthotics if you use them) with you, so the assistant can look at the wear to understand your running style.
2. Plan on spending some time there, expect lots of questions about type, frequency, location and surfaces that you run (or plan to run) on. Expect several running shoe options to try.
3. Simply trying on the shoes and walking a few steps inside the shop is not enough. Run in each pair of shoes to test for fit and comfort before making a decision.
4. You'll need to replace your shoes every 300-400 miles, and once you've found a make and model that fits, you may be able to find your shoes online for less money.
5. Buy shoes in the afternoon or evening. Your feet swell slightly through the day so this will help get the fit right.

Here are a few websites which might help:

www.jogscotland.org.uk/ www.runandbecome.com/ <http://scottishrunningguide.com/>
<http://running.about.com/od/shoesapparel/gear/a/foottypes.htm> <http://www.run4it.com/>

Finally, and very importantly: if you haven't exercised for a while, or have any medical conditions which might cause problems, check with your Doctor to ensure it's safe to increase your activity levels. Remember, pain is a sign that something is wrong.... And if you're just starting to run, don't do too much too soon !

Alan Clinch