

## Athletic Shoes

With the many types of athletic shoes that are available, it can be hard to choose the right shoes for you. There are differences in design and variations in material and weight. The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons says that these differences have been developed to protect the areas of the feet that encounter the most stress in a particular athletic activity. Let's review some of the different types of sports shoes available.

- **Athletic shoes** are grouped into the following categories: running, training, and walking; they include shoes for hiking, jogging, and exercise walking. These shoes should have a comfortable soft upper, good shock absorption, smooth tread, and a rocker sole design that encourages the natural roll of the foot during the walking motion. Features of a good jogging shoe should include cushioning, flexibility, control, and stability in the heel counter area, lightness, and good traction. Whereas, cross-training shoes combine several characteristics of other types of shoes so that you can participate in more than one sport and wear the same shoe. A good cross trainer should have flexibility in the forefoot that you need for running, in addition to stability on the inside and outside of the shoe for the control needed for aerobics and tennis. Walking shoes should flex easily at the ball of the foot, which help feet to push forward.

- **Court sport shoes** include shoes for tennis, basketball, and volleyball. Most court sports require the



body to move forward, backward, and side-to-side. As a result, most athletic shoes used for court sports are subjected to heavy abuse. The key to finding a good court shoe is the sole. Ask a coach or shoes salesperson to help you select the best type of sole for your sport.

- **Field sport shoes** include shoes for soccer, football, and baseball. These shoes are cleated, studded, or spiked. The spike and stud formations vary from sport to sport, but they generally are replaceable or detachable cleats, spikes, or studs affixed into nylon soles.
- **Track and field sport shoes** are very specific to the sport. The needs of the individual are most important when picking the shoe. For example, foot types, gait patterns, and training styles should always be considered. It is always best to ask a coach about the type of shoe that should be selected for the event in which you are participating.



Proper-fitting sports shoes can enhance performance and prevent injuries. Follow these specially designed fitting facts when purchasing a new pair of athletic shoes:

- Try on athletic shoes after a workout or run and at the end of the day. Your feet will be at their largest.
- Wear the same type of sock that you will wear for that sport.
- When the shoe is on your foot, you should be able to freely wiggle all of your toes. There should be a thumb's width from the tip of the toe to the end of the shoe.

- The shoes should be comfortable as soon as you try them on. There is no break-in period. If they're not comfortable in the store, they won't be comfortable when you're exercising.
- Walk or run a few steps in the shoes. They should be comfortable. The heel of the shoe should not slip off the foot as you walk or run.
- Always re-lace the shoes you are trying on. You should lace through each top eyelet as you crisscross the lacing pattern to ensure a more snug fit and decrease slippage. Don't tie the laces too tight as this may cause injury to the nerves or tendons on the top of the foot and ankle.
- There should be a firm grip of the shoe to your heel. Your heel should not slip as you walk or run.
- The toe box should be square for adequate toe room.
- The shoe should have side and tongue padding for extra comfort. Cushioning on the cuff around the ankle and at the Achilles tendon helps to reduce friction and irritation.
- The inner sole should be soft and resilient, with adequate arch cushions.
- The reflector should be as big as possible, especially if you will be outside at dusk or dawn.
- The insole should be removable for cleaning and, when it loses springiness, replacement.

Now that you know what type of shoe to buy and tips to picking out a properly fitting shoe, you need to consider its construction—how well it was made. Understanding the basics of shoe construction can help you choose intelligently from among the thousands of available styles.

- Stitching should be secure, even, and straight. There should be no rough spots, wrinkles, bulky seams, or gummy adhesives.
- Rubber around the base of the shoe should be one continuous strip, tightly attaching the sole to the upper.

### References:

American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, <http://orthoinfo.aaos.org>  
 Consumer Reports, [www.consumerreports.org](http://www.consumerreports.org)  
 American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons, [www.acfas.org](http://www.acfas.org)

*Prepared by:* Courtney J. Schoessow, MPH, Extension Program Specialist–Health, Texas Cooperative Extension, December 2005, Family & Consumer Sciences website:  
<http://fcs.tamu.edu>

In addition to being overwhelmed by all the choices in athletic shoes, you may be surprised at how much they cost. Slick ads and television commercials tout technological features, the latest gimmicks, and shoes named after sports celebrities. Paying more than \$100 does not necessarily get you a better shoe. Good quality shoes may be pricey, but don't overlook the less expensive shoes because they can outperform their costlier brandmates. Be sure that whatever price you decide to pay for the shoes, it's because the shoe has the features that meet your needs—not because it is a certain brand or has a sports celebrity's name on it.

