

Fitness Footwear

Have you ever walked into a sports store to buy new training shoes and been overwhelmed by how many different kinds there are? Have you ever been confused about what type of shoes you should buy for your fitness activities?

Sport shoes are designed to protect your feet and legs from the stresses of the activities you undertake. However, the forces and motions associated with different activities vary a lot. For example, the foot and legwork involved in running are vastly different to that of tennis or aerobics or gym work. Shoe manufacturers have responded to the biomechanical science involved in different activities by developing an extensive range of activity specific or sport specific shoes. That is one reason for why there are now so many different training shoes on the market. Add to that competing brands, styles, colours and fashions within each shoe category and you end up with the myriad of options that confront you when you walk into the sports shoe store.

The first step in choosing the right training shoes for you is to think about what you are going to use them for. If your answer is 'a bit of everything' then think a bit more.

Running shoes are designed for running as a sport as opposed to the sort of running you might do as part of another sport. They are designed to absorb the high impact of continuous running, often on hard surfaces for significant periods of time. They are well cushioned and feature flexibility in the forefoot, and control and stability in the heel. They also have a durable sole, good traction and are relatively lightweight.

Cross trainers are multi purpose fitness shoes and can be used for different fitness activities. They are suitable for those who do 2-3 different kinds of fitness activities 2-3 times a week. They are best for activities or sports done on reliable, consistent and flat surfaces like gym floors, tennis courts, flat grass or bike paths. They have some flexibility in the forefoot, and some lateral stability and rear foot cushioning.

Walking shoes are designed to accommodate the natural rolling action of walking and less impact than running. They flex easily at the ball of the foot and have a comfortable soft upper. They also have relatively firm heel support and some rear foot cushioning.

Some people who power walk or walk quickly may find running shoes suit them better than walking shoes, and people who do the same activity or sport more than three times a week may find activity specific or sport specific shoes (eg, tennis shoes, netball shoes etc) suit them better than cross trainers.

When trying on and buying new training shoes think about the following:

- Don't buy in a rush. Shop around and try on different brands and styles of shoes in the shoe category you are interested in.
- Get fitted properly. Training shoes are completely different in fit and feel to regular shoes.
- Try on training shoes after a workout or at the end of the day when your feet are at their most swollen.
- Allow about a thumbnail's space between your longest toe and the end of the shoe. You should be able to freely wriggle your toes but your heels should not slip around.

- Wear the same kind of socks that you train in.
- Try both the left and right shoes on.
- The shoes should be comfortable as soon as you put them on. Do not allow for a 'break in' period. There should be no such thing with training shoes.
- Walk or run a few steps in the shoes to compare the comfort and feel of different shoes. Choose what feels the best. Then think about colour, style and fashion.

After choosing your new training shoes get out there and put them to good use. Make them work for you.

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