



How to Buy the Right Athletic Shoes

By **Tonia Moore**

Do I need different pairs of shoes to play tennis, run, and do aerobics?

While it will do some damage to your bank account, you need a sport-specific pair of shoes for any activity you do more than three times a week. Otherwise you risk injury and may hamper your performance. A running shoe, for example, provides extra cushioning and has a more durable outsole (the bottom of a shoe) than an aerobics shoe, which supports your ankle when you make sudden side-to-side movements.

A tennis shoe also lets you move laterally more easily than a running shoe, and, like the aerobics shoe, will help prevent your foot from rolling over and causing an ankle sprain when you make a sudden stop. The tennis shoe has extra rubber in areas that receive the most punishment in this sport, such as the toe and ball of the foot.

A cross training shoe combines the forefoot flexibility of a running shoe with the side-to-side support of an aerobics shoe, and may be a good choice if you do several different activities.

What brands should I look for?

There's no overall winning manufacturer. Once you try on several brands, you'll realize that every company has its own style; some make shoes for wide feet, others put in a lot of arch support. Even sizing varies from make to make. You may wear a 10 in one brand and an 11 in another. So forget advertising and sponsored athletes and go for the pair that suits your feet.

How can I be sure the shoe fits?

"Shoes shouldn't need to be broken in to feel comfortable," says Tom Brunick, director of The Athlete's Foot Stores R & D Center in Naperville, Illinois. "If a shoe is uncomfortable in the store, that discomfort will be compounded at the gym or on the road." Here are some tips for finding a good fit:

- There should be a half-inch between the tip of your longest toe and the end of the shoe.
- Try on both shoes; one foot is usually bigger than the other.
- Make sure the ball of your foot fits easily in the widest part of the shoe. Likewise, your heel shouldn't slip around in the back of the shoe.
- Shop in the late afternoon when your feet are slightly swollen, especially if you typically exercise after work.
- Try to wear the same type of socks you normally wear when you exercise.
- Women with wide or large feet may have better luck with men's shoes, which are generally cut wider.

How often should I replace my shoes?

If you exercise three to five times a week, probably every three to six months is a good guide. Better yet, examine your shoes closely once a month and look for signs of excessive wear, such as missing tread, flattened midsoles, and torn stitching where the uppers meet the sole. Pay attention to what your feet are telling you, as well. When your dogs are barking incessantly, it's time for new shoes.

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