

Selecting the right sport shoes

The most important piece of equipment for any physical activity is, undeniably, the shoe. A comfortable sport shoe can make your experience much more enjoyable.

A shoe that doesn't fit properly or that is ill-suited for your particular type of physical activity can harm the back, hips, knees and ankles.

It's important to realize that 25 percent of the population has some type of foot problem that requires special shoes, and that women experience four times the number of foot problems than men. Therefore, it's important to select a shoe based on the morphology of one's foot.

A person's foot shape is generally classified among three categories:

- 1- a flat foot (no arch)
- 2- a normal foot
- 3- a foot with a pronounced arch

Each type of foot requires a different type of shoe. A flat foot needs strong support to accommodate lateral movements. For normal feet, we recommend a shoe that offers good stability. Finally, our advice is to opt for a shoe with excellent cushioning for a foot with a pronounced arch.

I always advise people to buy their sport shoes at specialty stores (e.g. Sports Experts, SAIL, etc.) and to particularly avoid boutiques selling trendy shoes, as these are completely unsuitable for sports activities. Very often, these shoes don't offer good support and have a heel that's too high (the heel of a sneaker should never exceed one inch). What's more, salespersons who work in sporting goods stores are generally better-equipped to give you good advice. A qualified salesperson will ask you to walk nearby in order to examine your gait and then determine your specific needs according to your foot morphology. When it's time to go shopping, bring along an old shoe so that the clerk can examine its particular wear pattern.

Tips for buying shoes

- 1- Shop in the late afternoon, as feet swell during the day. This way, you can ensure that your new shoes won't be too tight.
- 2- Determine your foot morphology in advance so that you can inform the salesperson.
- 3- If you wear orthoses, bring them with you to see whether they fit your new shoes.
- 4- Try on your sneakers with the type of socks you normally wear.
- 5- Select an athletic shoe that's a half-size bigger than your dress shoe. Another indicator to help you find the right size: the width of your thumb should fit between the end of your big toe and that of the shoe.
- 6- Try on **both** shoes and lace them up completely. We often have one foot that's slightly bigger than the other. Choose the size that fits the larger foot best.
- 7- Walk or jog in the store, or reproduce the same movements you normally perform when you exercise; this will help you determine how the shoe will support your movements. As well, try to walk on different surfaces (e.g. carpet, wood floor, etc.).
- 8- Spread out the toes to verify whether the width of the shoe is appropriate for your foot size.
- 9- Make sure that your heel stays in place while you walk in order to minimize friction and, consequently, blisters.

10- See to it that you can easily bend your toes, since the shoe sole must be flexible enough to allow a proper extension of the foot while walking.

You should be prepared to pay between \$100 and \$150 for good-quality athletic shoes. It is also recommended that you replace your pair every 500 kilometres, or every six months, if you regularly engage in physical activity.

Among the more notable brands, we have New Balance, Asics, Nike Air, Brooks and Ryka. Ryka is a sneaker brand made by women for women, so it's well-suited for our needs. Among the other choices for outdoor shoes, Merrell and Salomon are also good brands.

There's a shoe for every activity

For every type of athlete and category of physical activity, there are certain features to look for when picking the right shoe. Here are some guidelines:

For the **casual sportswoman** who practices several different sports, we recommended that you opt for a cross-training shoe. This type of shoe offers good support and absorbs shock well, but is generally a little heavier.

For the **dedicated walker**, we recommend a shoe specifically designed for walking; such a shoe will be lighter than a cross-trainer. The upper of the shoe is selected according to one's foot shape.

For the **runner or jogger**, the prime consideration should be shock absorption in order to avoid back and knee injury.

For the **aerobics fan**, shock absorption should also be taken into account, with an added emphasis on higher ankle support to avoid sprains during lateral movements. As well, the preference here is for a light shoe.

For the **racquet sport enthusiast** (tennis, squash, racquetball), the shoe should be lower and more rigid with a durable, shock-absorbent sole.

The difference between indoor and outdoor shoes often focuses on the sole's flex grooves. An outdoor shoe should have deeper flex grooves to maximize traction, while an indoor shoe will have a smoother sole.

More and more, athletic shoes are arranged in sporting goods stores according to the type of physical activity. This makes it easier to select the shoe that's right for us.

Let's start off on the right foot!