

# Does the Shoe Fit?

## How to Select Your Running or Walking Shoes for the Best Results

By Virginia “Gini” Davis, PT



**R**unners and walkers may feel overwhelmed by the choices available in shoes, particularly since the athletic footwear industry introduces more technologically sophisticated shoes with newer design and features every year. Slick ads and television commercials tout these new styles and features, but offer little in the way of advice in selecting the shoes that match your feet. One brand or style will not meet the needs of everyone and the latest innovation or most expensive shoe with all the “bells and whistles” may not be the best choice for you.

### **You can walk in running shoes, but you cannot run in walking shoes.**

Both types of shoes should have a rounded toe box and a good heel counter for control.

Running shoes should be designed for shock absorption in the heel and forefoot region, but allow flexibility across the toe area.

Walking shoes should be designed for shock absorption in the heel and forefoot, but the front part of the shoe should have some stiffness so that you can roll off your toes rather than bend through them as you do in running shoes.

### **Find an athletic shoe store with knowledgeable sales people**

Shop at a store that specializes in running and walking shoes where the owners and salespersons actually participate in these activities and have a wealth of experience in fitting shoes.

Provide the salesperson with information about your running/walking program: how many years you have been running/walking, how often and how long you run/walk, how fast, where you train, past injuries, past shoe-brand experience and your weight. This information should be taken into consideration when making your shoe selection.

### **Shoe fit is the key.**

The best-designed shoes in the world will not do their job if they do not fit properly. Here are a few tips that should help you “sort through” the

available shoe choices and ensure an easier selection:

- Don’t go just by size – have your feet measured when standing.
- Visit the shoe store at the end of a workout or at the end of the day when your feet are largest.
- Wear the socks you normally wear when working out.
- If you wear orthotics, bring them with you to place into the shoes that you are trying on.

### **Fit the shoe to the largest foot.**

- Make sure the shoe provides at least one thumbnail’s width between the end of your longest toe and the end of the toe box. You should be able to fully extend your toes when standing.
- Find a shoe with a wide toe box if you have bunions or hammertoes.
- Shoes should be comfortable from the moment you put them on – they will not stretch out! If the shoes hurt in the store, don’t buy them.

- Women with large or wide feet, or with bunions/hammertoes, should consider buying men's or boy's shoes which are cut wider for the same length.
- DO NOT select shoes based on color and style alone.

## Special Foot Problems

Some people have special foot problems, like flat feet or very high arched feet that require special consideration. Sometimes simple adjustments in the shoes or a simple over the counter device can be placed inside of the shoe to relieve the symptoms or discomfort. A heel cup, arch support, metatarsal pad or changing the lacing of the shoe can help.

Problems that cannot be solved with over the counter measures suggested by your sales person may also be alleviated by stretching and conditioning, or the use of a custom fabricated orthotic. These devices, prescribed by your physician, may be fabricated specifically for you following an evaluation by your physical therapist. Again, just as with your athletic shoe store sales person, look for healthcare professionals who are experienced in treating foot and ankle problems and orthotic fabrication and fitting, and participate in running and walking activities.

Your shoes are your most important sports equipment so take the time to find the most knowledgeable people to help you in your selection.

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