

Function before fashion: when shopping for running shoes

Most of us have heard the children's song, "Dem Bones," that has often been used to teach children basic anatomy or the skeleton bones.

Just in case you are not familiar with the lyrics, they go something like this... "With the toe bone connected to the foot bone, and the foot bone connected to the ankle bone, and the ankle bone connected to the leg bone. With the leg bone connected to the knee bone, and the knee bone connected to the thigh bone, and the thigh bone connected to the hip bone."

And the song continues up the body to the head. Although the song may not be completely anatomically correct, it does make a point: we are connected from head to toe with bones, muscles, tendons and ligaments. Consequently, it's important to keep our body in alignment.

The balance, support and driving force of a runner's body all depend on the feet. Our feet are made up of 26 bones, 33 joints, 112 ligaments, and a network of tendons, nerves and blood vessels that work together



Runner's Rap

by Ronda Jameel

to create the synergy involved in running.

For runners, the most critical piece of apparel is shoes. If your feet aren't happy, the rest of your body won't be either. It's important to understand that if you plan to run, you need to buy a shoe specific to running. Not a sneaker, tennis shoe, cross-trainer, aerobic, basketball or walking shoe, but a running shoe made for running and only running.

My motto in shopping for a shoe: function before fashion.

Foot type? What's this? There are three basic foot types, each based on the height of your arches: normal

arch, flat/low arch or high arch. Foot types may also be classified by your pronation type: normal pronator, overpronator or underpronator. Pronation is the rolling inward of the foot and is critical to the proper shock absorption and distribution of the forces during impact. Knowing your foot type is the first step toward finding the right shoe.

If you have a normal arch, you are likely a normal pronator and you can wear a variety of shoes, but may be best suited to a stability shoe that provides moderate arch support and offers moderate pronation control. Lightweight runners with normal arches may prefer neutral-cushioned shoes without any added support.

If you have a flat/low arch, you're probably an overpronator. When your foot strikes the ground, your arch collapses inward too much, resulting in excessive foot motion and increasing your risk of inju-

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ries. You will most likely need stability shoes, which employ devices to reduce pronation and are best for mild to moderate overpronators, or motion-control shoes, which have firmer support and are best for severe overpronators.

If you have a high arch you're likely an underpronator, or supinator. Your arch does not collapse inward enough to absorb the shock and can result in too much shock traveling up your legs. Underpronators are usually best in neutral-cushioned shoes because they need a softer midsole to encourage pronation and a more natural foot motion. It's vital that an underpronator's shoes have no added stability devices to reduce or control pronation, the way a stability or motion-control shoe would.

Here are a few tips in buying your next pair of running shoes. First and foremost, visit a running specialty store. They carry a wide selection of brands and models and have running experts who can put you in the best shoe. Secondly, have both feet measured for width and length, even if you think you know your size. Your feet tend to spread and lengthen (from running and aging), so don't be surprised that your running shoes may be a half or full size larger than what you are accustomed to wearing. Thirdly, try on a wide variety of styles and brands. One brand isn't necessarily better than any other. Take

your time. Put your running socks on (and if you wear orthotics, place them in the shoes) and walk around the store in the shoes. Jog around outside. If it doesn't feel or fit right in the store, it won't feel better when you run. Ask about the store's return policy. Most good running stores have a liberal policy that allows you to return and/or exchange shoes that are clean and have not been worn a great deal. But check and always keep the sales receipt.

If your running is in the beginning stages, don't assume you need the least expensive shoe available. You won't need the most expensive either, but you will need just as much cushioning and durability as a more experienced runner will. Plan to spend between \$75 and \$110 for a high-quality technical model running shoe. Bigger runners who need added support and durability might have to pay a little more.

It is important that runners replace their shoes approximately every 350-400 miles. The shoe may look like new on the outside, but the midsole, which is the most important part of the shoe, will be worn out by then. Shoes should be replaced approximately every six months, especially in warm climates, because the shoes will begin to deteriorate.

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