

Are you wearing the right shoes?

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Spring has arrived and that means warmer temperatures and increased outdoor activities. Use this time to take an inventory of the type and style(s) of shoes you plan to wear before heading outside.

With every step, gravity, body-weight and ground reaction forces are transmitted through are feet. Ground reaction forces are the summation of foot-pounds of force transmitted from the ground up into our feet and are roughly 1.5 times our body-weight. Proper shoes can help control and distribute these forces so foot problems can be prevented or even alleviated

First, determine your foot-type. Shoes are designed for three different foot-types: 1. supinators (high-arches), 2. pronators (flat-footed), and 3. neutral arches. To find out your specific foot-type consult either a podiatrist or physical therapist who are trained in examining feet or simply get your feet wet and walk across a dry sidewalk. If your foot print is dry where your arch is you are a supinator. If your foot print is completely filled in you are a pronator. If your foot print is slightly dry under the arch area you have a neutral arch.

Select brands and models based on your foot-type. Supinators need shoes with maximum cushioning, pronators need shoes with motion-control and stability, and neutral-arched people can wear shoes with a hybrid of both. It will take a little investigating to figure out which makes and models are for your foot-type, but it is worth the time. Purchasing shoes made for a different foot-type could create pain in the feet and lead to joint or soft-tissue pain in the ankle, knees or hips.

Next, find out your EXACT foot dimensions. Go to a shoe store and measure both the current width and length of your foot using a standard Brannock measuring device in standing. Measure your foot close to the end of the day when the feet tend to swell slightly. Most people are buying shoes that are currently a half to full size smaller and narrower than they should be wearing. If you wear orthotics add an additional half-size to your shoe.

Finally, consider the activities you will be participating in and the surface you will be on. Walkers and joggers should both consider cross-trainer or running shoes. Select field shoes designed for the sport of choice in the summer. Office workers should consider the amount of time spent standing and make choices accordingly. As a general rule of thumb, shoes with any type of heel should be avoided since this places increased pressure on the toes and arch region and can lead to shortening of the Achilles tendon (which can lead to other potential foot-ankle or knee problems).

Test shoes in the store for basic support and stability. Squeeze the heel counter (back part of the shoe where the heel is). The sides should not touch. Twist the toe-box (front part of the shoe where the toes rest) and heel counter in opposite directions. The arch of the shoe should stay fairly straight. Compress the front and back of the shoe. The shoe should bend up in the toe-box, not the arch.

Be prepared to buy new shoes on a regular basis. Walkers and runners should replace shoes every 300-500 miles. Exposing shoes to moisture accelerates deterioration of the outer construction. Any tears or holes along the stitching of a shoe indicate a lack of adequate support. As a general rule, athletic shoes should be bought every season and regular shoes every six to 12 months.

Good brands for recreational and athletic use are New Balance, Brooks, Asics and Vans. For casual shoe needs, Dunham, Rockport and Merrell provide good choices.

Comfortable, healthy footwear can contribute to happy feet and success in all endeavors.