



Best Sneakers For Your Sport

Allison Van Dusen, 03.10.08

If something has inspired you to start a fitness regimen or get back into a sport you once played, do yourself a favor, and as you get ready for that first outing, skip the trip to your closet for your two-year-old pair of sneakers.

Not only are they broken down, but they were probably never meant to support the type of motion you're about to subject them to, whether it's a long hike, a game of tennis or marathon training.

If you really want to succeed--and stave off runner's knee, shin splints and tendonitis, not to mention the cost of rehabbing these injuries--you need the right shoes, says Gale Bernhardt, a coach for the 2004 Olympics' U.S. mens' and womens' triathlon teams and a columnist for Active.com, an online community for people passionate about sports and recreational activities.

In Depth: Best Sneakers For Your Sport

While a pair of sneakers might not exactly make you "better" at your chosen sport, the right pair can help you stay healthy, prevent you from the distractions of performance-crippling frozen, wet and blistered feet and potentially keep you on the court or trail a little bit longer.

"Anybody who has spent any time running, hiking or even kayaking knows that if you have the wrong footwear on," says Kurt Geller, footwear product manager for outdoor-gear retailer Eastern Mountain Sports, "it ruins it."

Just don't assume that walking into any retailer with a wad of cash will solve the problem. Much like love, money can't necessarily buy you the right sneaker, either.

A small study published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* last fall found that there were no major differences among shoes bought from three different manufacturers in three different price ranges. Plantar pressure--the force created by the impact of the sole hitting the ground--was actually found to be lower in cheap to moderately priced shoes versus the most expensive pairs. Price also wasn't an indicator of comfort.

"People get sucked into what shoe looks pretty, which star is supporting which shoe," says Dr. Rebecca Demorest, an assistant attending physician at the Hospital for Special

Surgery in New York and team doctor for USA Rowing. "But an expensive shoe doesn't mean it's a better shoe."

Top Shopping Tips

Getting the right sneakers for your sport, experts say, starts with choosing a good retailer, preferably a specialty shop or a store where the salespeople will at least examine your gait. What they should be trying to figure out is whether your arch is low, normal or high--something you can determine yourself by stepping on a paper towel with a wet foot and examining your print--and how much you pronate, or turn your foot inward to distribute the force of impact as you walk.

Flat-footed people, for instance, typically overpronate and need motion-controlling shoes. Those with high arches, who tend to underpronate, need mid-sole cushioning.

And don't forget to get your feet measured. You may have been a size 11 all your life, but as you age or gain weight, your shoe size can easily increase, says Larry Schwartz, CEO of Aetrex Worldwide, an industry leader in pedorthic footwear and maker of the iStep digital foot-scanning system.

Get measured every time you buy sneakers, or once a year if you tend to buy your shoes online. If you're really focused on fit, in 30 seconds, an iStep, available at certain retailers, can capture your foot type, pressure points and shoe size, and recommend the ideal footwear and orthotics for you.

Wearing athletic socks to try on sneakers and shopping for them late in the day, when you're feet are more likely to be swollen, are essential steps too.

Next, it's time to get sport-specific. If you love to play basketball, you'll want a shoe with a lot of ankle support; that will help you to avoid getting injured as you land after posting a shot or going for a rebound. If you run to stay fit, rather than cross a finish line, skip the bells and whistles and go for a performance shoe with a good level of cushioning, Geller says.

Should you end up sticking with your new routine, remember to frequently change your shoes. For runners, the recommendation is to buy a new pair at least every 300 to 500 miles, or when you start to notice little aches in your knees, hips, ankles or shins with no other explanation.

In other words, don't wait two years.