

# HOW TO BUY SPORTS SHOES

They're the most important piece of equipment in your fitness wardrobe – so there's much more to consider than just the colour and brand when you're buying a pair...

**S**ports shoes are far more than a fashion statement, you know. First and foremost they protect your feet and body, says podiatrist Trevor Prior from the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists. 'When you run, on average, you place two- to three-times your body weight through your feet – and sprinters can place up to 13-times. If there is poor foot function as a result of unsupportive footwear, flawed technique or inappropriate surfaces, risk of injury increases.'

So to summarise, your trainers have a lot to deal with. 'They need to withstand an array of forces – even if you're running in a straight line, there are rotational forces your body has to absorb,' says footwear expert Andy Barber of [www.shoeguide.co.uk](http://www.shoeguide.co.uk). 'And if you're taking part in an activity that involves changes of direction and sideways movement, such as tennis, there are even more complex forces at work.'

Since different activities place different demands on your body, it's important to buy shoes appropriate to your sport, adds Prior. 'Although some shoes are "multi-activity", much depends on the type and level of activity you plan to do. The phrase "Jack of all trades, master of none" can be applied here!'

Natasha Eastman, foot technician at Profeet, specialists in custom-fit sports footwear ([www.profeet.co.uk](http://www.profeet.co.uk)), agrees it's important to buy sport-specific shoes. 'Ball sports, such as football for instance, involve a lot of side-to-side motion, so suitable shoes are lower to the ground, have decreased tread and a more robust upper,' she says. 'Running shoes, on the other hand, are designed to cope better with the straight-line nature of running by being stronger longitudinally. They're also made of materials that can handle the increased impact and shock,' she adds. ➤

## The basics of buying

'Buy from specialist retailers whenever possible and ask for assistance – their reputation depends on offering you good service,' says Barber. They should measure the width and length of your foot, and offer an analysis of your gait – which, in turn, will determine the shoe you'll be offered. 'If you're buying running shoes, find a shop that offers a force plate or treadmill gait assessment. Check the credentials of the person doing the assessment, as the most important part is the ability of the person operating the equipment to read the results.'

Plan your shoe-buying trip carefully, adds Barber. 'Try to buy your training shoes when the shop is quiet. At off-peak times you'll have longer to browse and try on. Shop in the afternoon or evening as your feet swell slightly through the day, just as they would during exercise. Take your normal sports socks with you, to get an accurate sense of fit and feel.'

Your shoes should be supportive – but not so supportive they won't allow your body to be tested by exercise, says Prior. 'There needs to be a balance between cushioning and support. The increased stress of exercise can be offset by cushioning within the shoe. However, if there's too much cushioning, the body's natural shock-absorbing mechanisms may not function adequately.'

'Go with the size of shoe that fits you, rather than sticking to your "usual" size,' says Eastman. 'Allow one thumbnail's width

between the end of your longest toe and the end of the shoe. And your foot should be held firmly in place by the laces.' You may find you take a full size larger in running shoes than in normal shoes.

Finally, always remember that an inappropriate shoe could lead to injury, while a good one enhances performance.

### And don't forget...

You've got your shoes – now it's imperative you look after them so they continue to perform at maximum capacity. First, keep them solely for the activity for which you purchased them, otherwise you risk injury. 'If you were to use a running shoe for an activity with a lot of sideways (lateral) movement, the grip and support of this shoe would be fighting against you. You could damage your shoes by breaking down the sides of the shoe or find the outsole pulls away from the midsole,' says Barber. Let them rest too, adds Prior. 'Allow sufficient time for them to dry out after exercise; usually at least 24 hours – longer if you've been outdoors and they're wet.' And don't be tempted to clean them in a washing machine – use lukewarm water and a toothbrush or sponge. To further protect your feet, complement your shoes with high-performance socks. 'I'd recommend socks with a high-cotton content, protective areas and good moisture control,' says Prior. Replace your shoes after 500 miles.

## Running

### Essential features

■ Buy shoes that suit your gait (hence the importance of an assessment) – whether you have a neutral footstrike, you over-pronate (possibly due to low or flat arches) or supinate/under-pronate (perhaps as a result of high arches). The shoes will have in-built support that is specific to your needs.

■ Running shoes are lightweight and flexible. You should look for shoes that give you a feeling of smooth transition from the moment of impact to toe-off.

■ You need shoes with some spring to them. If the cushioning is too firm, it won't feel comfortable; but cushioning that's too soft will mean you lose a feel for the ground. Look for something in-between.

### Saucony ProGrid Triumph 5, £85

[www.saucony.co.uk](http://www.saucony.co.uk)

Light, with an ultra-flexible sole, this shoe is really cushioned. Not as secure a fit around the heel as I'm used to, but still stable with no areas of discomfort or rubbing. Excellent ventilation in the forefoot meant my feet didn't swell much and I ran for 20 minutes longer than intended! It also has moisture-wicking, anti-microbial and anti-odour insoles. A super-comfortable ride.

### Mizuno Wave Rider 11 (W), £75

[www.mizuno.co.uk](http://www.mizuno.co.uk)

A hardcore runners' favourite – I fell in love with the great comfort these light, neutral-gait shoes offer. Efficient motion, good shock absorption and stability with no areas of discomfort or rubbing, plus plenty of room in the toes, with great ventilation at the front of the foot and in the midsole. They were so bouncy and minimized roll so well, I felt I could run for hours.

### Puma Complete Phasis IV, £65

[www.pumarunning.com](http://www.pumarunning.com)

For the neutral runner to the mild overpronator, this shoe offers superb stability, comfort and cushioning. There was minimal rolling and I felt light and bouncy. They're really snug and supportive around the heel but with plenty of toe space. The breathable mesh fabric at the toes makes them comfortable and breezy. However, I found the tongue a bit too big – it dug into my shin a little.

### Asics Gel-Cumulus 9 TN795, £85

[www.asics.co.uk](http://www.asics.co.uk)

Designed for high mileage, these shoes are beautifully cushioned and feel very stable. A slightly angled heel reduces roll and makes for a smooth movement from heel to forefoot. The gender-specific midsole feels really comfortable. The only minus is the shoe bashed into my ankle bone a little, which could cause blisters on long distances.

