

# How to Choose a Running Shoe

## An Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Surgeon's Perspective

Walking into a Running Store and shopping for running shoes can be a daunting task. The available options are almost limitless. Should you pick the flimsy, lightweight "minimalist" shoe or the shoe that has so much cushioning you feel like you're walking on a cloud? Where should you begin?

Start by asking yourself: Am I currently running in the *wrong* shoe? Do you experience pain when you run? Running mechanics can be influenced by shoe type so it may be time to consider a change to another shoe category. Running shoes typically fall into four general categories: minimalist, neutral, stability/motion control and ultra high cushioning. Running in the incorrect shoe type can exacerbate or cause a lower extremity problem.

Begin by visiting a good running shoe store late in the day. Why late in the day? You should always buy shoes at the end of the day. Our feet swell throughout the day so a shoe that fits great in the morning may be too tight by the evening. Don't stuff your foot into a shoe that's too short or too narrow. What could happen? A running shoe that is too short will cause bleeding under your toenails...causing the dreaded black toenail. A shoe that's too narrow will smash the delicate nerves between your metatarsal bones creating a neuroma.

The sales associates at the running shoe store will analyze your foot shape. How does the shape of your foot affect your shoe choice? For starters, the shape (or last) of the shoe needs to match the anatomic shape of your foot. Next, they will consider which shoe category will work best for you. If you have a flatter foot shape and experience pain along the inside part of your foot when you run, you may want to try "stability" or "motion control" running shoes. These shoes provide more structure and support for your bones, tendons and ligaments. If you have a normal or high arch, you should start with a neutral shoe, as your foot may not need the additional support.

What is the hype surrounding the minimalist running shoes trend? Take off your shoes and run across a grassy field. You'll notice your gait changes and you land more on the front part of your foot and less on your heel. The minimalist shoe encourages this more "natural" gait pattern. This may be good for you if you're a runner with a history of knee or hip problems as more shock absorption occurs through the foot and ankle with this running style. But the extra force on your foot may cause an overuse injury to the bones, tendons or ligaments in your foot or ankle. In extreme cases, this leads to metatarsal stress fractures, Achilles tendonitis and/or calf muscle tears. If you are interested in changing your running style, enlist the help of a running coach or physical therapist experienced in running mechanics.

What about these "ultra high-cushioned" shoes? Running on a soft cloud of cushioning sounds pretty great. These shoes provide a much thicker sole, a rocker-bottom shape and a firmer structure. If you suffer from a bone or ligament problem in the front part of your foot, these shoes may reduce the stress on this part of your foot. Try these shoes if you have very tight calf muscles or limited ankle motion. But, if you have a history of ankle ligament injuries and have chronically weak ankles, the squishy cushion may lead to more ankle instability.

If you've been using the same shoe or brand with success then maybe there's no need to make a change. Just remember that shoes don't last forever and you should aim to replace them every 300-500 miles or about every 3-6 months.

In summary, there are a ton of wonderful shoe options that will complement your unique foot structure and running style. When it's time to buy new shoes, take your time and try on lots of different styles and brands. See how the shoe feels standing still and take a short jog outside. There shouldn't be any sort of a "break-in" period. The shoe you choose should feel great the moment you first try it on.

Good luck and happy shopping!

Dr. Buchanan