

## Footwear considerations

Shopping for a pair of shoes, particularly athletic shoes, can be a very difficult process. A multitude of different styles, brands, features—not to mention sizes—are available. With so many options to consider, you may feel overwhelmed. The multibillion-dollar shoe industry has certainly introduced a great deal of complexity into buying a pair of shoes. Yet, there are a few very simple but important considerations in buying a pair of shoes which are too often forgotten:

- More expensive doesn't always mean better. In some cases, you'll need to move the cardboard Tiger Woods cutout aside in order to reach the cross-trainers on the "clearance" rack that are perfect for your feet.
- Know your foot. Do you have high, low, or neutral arches? A foot with a low arch will have a greater tendency to roll inward (pronation) than a high or neutral arch foot. For low arches, choose a shoe that is straighter along the outside contour, firm in the middle, and more rigid at the heel. Higher arches will require a softer middle and heel with a more curved outer contour. If you're unsure about your arches, dip your foot in water, step on a dark surface, and examine your footprint. If you can see most of your foot, you probably have low arches; if little of your foot is visible, you probably have high arches.
- Know your size. Measure the length and width of both feet regularly. The feet may continue to grow even if you're not getting any taller. Measure your foot at its widest: make sure you wear socks similar to those you'll wear during activity, and that measurements are taken in standing while weight-bearing.
- Pay attention to comfort, not design. The latest footwear technology won't matter a bit if the shoe pinches, pokes or hurts your foot.
- Select shoes appropriate for your activity. A running shoe provides more cushioning for shock absorption and is lighter weight. Basketball shoes provide more ankle support for sudden stops, starts, and change of direction on the court. A good walking contains extra shock absorption in the heel, a slightly curved rocker contour on the underside, and is heavier and more rigid than a running shoe. Cross-training shoes are designed with the forefoot flexibility you'd need for running, but they also have the lateral support you'd want for aerobics or tennis. Lateral support is important in activities with a lot of side-to-side movement, to protect your ankles from injury.
- Try on your shoes. Make sure your foot fits securely in each shoe and doesn't wiggle as you walk. Be sure there is at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch of wiggle room for your toes.
- Remember that shoes wear out. Your shoes may still feel comfortable, but they might not be providing you with enough support or shock absorption. Watch for signs of wear and/or tilting in your shoes. New aches and pains in your feet, knees, hips, or back may be a sign that your shoes need to be replaced. Running shoes should probably be replaced approximately every 300 miles. If you run every day or are a competitive walker, you may want to alternate two pairs of shoes and using one pair every other day.

These are general guidelines for selecting footwear. If you have a history of foot injury, leg length discrepancy, diabetes, or other custom-footwear need, consult a medical professional for specific guidelines.