

## **Running Shoes – do my feet look big in these?**

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Choosing a new pair of running shoes from a multitude of brands, each with many styles can be a frustrating experience and an expensive one if you make an inappropriate choice. Even if you just want to replace an existing pair of shoes, it may not be a simple matter as manufacturers keep changing designs and materials and the new model may not be identical in structure and materials to the one you have been wearing. It may also be the case that what you have been wearing is not the best type of shoe for your foot and running style. What follows may assist you to make an informed choice of shoes. If you have particular foot problems it may be useful to seek advice from a podiatrist.

Look at the soles of the shoes you have been wearing and examine the wear patterns. The degree of wear will depend on the distance travelled and the surfaces you have been running on, but the wear patterns on the left and right shoes should be the same. If you have a neutral style there should be wear on the outer rear edge of the heel, in the middle of the forefoot area and on the leading edge of the sole. This corresponds to a foot strike sequence of landing on the outer edge of the heel, rolling the foot inwards (pronation) and transferring weight onto the forefoot and then toeing off as the foot leaves the ground.

Some people over-pronate, rolling the foot too far inwards, an action that may be associated with a low foot arch. A shoe that has a stiffer section on the inside of the heel can reduce this action. A smaller group, often people with high arches, roll their foot outwards (supination) and a stiffer section on the outer side of the heel can help to correct this action. Both actions can lead to increased stress on the foot, ankle and further up the leg with consequent increased likelihood of injuries. An examination of shoe wear patterns and a video examination of your running style, bare foot on a treadmill will indicate what style of shoe is best for you. Don't just buy a style of shoe because a friend or an elite runner wears that style – it may not be an appropriate style for you.

The heel counter on the shoe should hold your heel firmly, but without putting pressure on the Achilles tendon. The lacing system and tongue should allow the shoe to be laced firmly. Some brands make different width shoes in a given style to provide a fit that does not cramp the toes or allow the foot to move across the shoe. In terms of length, your toes should be around a thumb's thickness from the end of the shoe when you are standing, wearing the type of socks you normally wear.

The upper section of the shoe will normally be made largely of a mesh material to allow ventilation of the foot. It is also the part of the shoe that you notice first, the "fashion statement" in terms of colour and pattern of the mesh and solid sections and the manufacturer's logos. Don't be swayed by appearance over fit. You will be feeling the shoe when you are running, not looking at it.

The heel and midsection of the shoe should be firm, but the forefoot needs to be flexible to allow the foot to bend easily as it lifts off the ground at the end of a stride. The

material of the sole should be durable enough to provide a reasonable period of use, possibly with a wear resistant section on the outside of the heel and at the toe. This may involve a compromise between hardness and grip. The midsole of the shoe is the softer section between the outer sole and the shoe liner that contains whatever cushioning system the manufacturer uses, in the heel, the fore foot or both. This cushioning is designed to absorb some of the impact force from each foot strike, often 3-5 times your body weight.

How long will a pair of shoes last? There is no definitive answer to this question, but for training shoes, somewhere in the range 600 - 1000km is likely, depending on the surfaces you run on, your weight and running style and the construction and materials used in the shoe. Sometimes your legs will tell you when the shoe has reached the end of its useful life. Obvious signs of wear on the soles and uppers may indicate that it is time to change, but it is likely to be the midsole of the shoe that wears out first, collapsing under the accumulated impacts of thousands of steps. Look at the outside edges of the midsole for creasing or other signs of compaction. Shoes may be expensive, but the injuries that may result from wearing worn shoes are usually more expensive.

There are three basic forms of running shoes in terms of weight: well-cushioned heavy duty training/racing shoes, lighter training/racing shoes and racing flats. Flats are lightweight shoes with minimal cushioning and thinner soles that will wear more quickly on rough surfaces than training shoes. Whether you should use light weight trainers or not depends on your running style, weekly distance run and the surfaces you run on. There are also shoes that are designed specifically for walking, specialised track spikes, all-terrain and cross-country shoes.

When you find a style/model of shoe that suits you well, it is a good idea to buy a second pair and alternate their use. This allows the midsoles of each pair of shoes to recover from the previous day's use and for the shoe to dry out thoroughly. It may be a large initial expense, but is likely to be more economical over the life of the shoes.

Go to a store that has a wide range of running shoes and staff who are well versed in matching the attributes of the shoes to your needs. Think about the good and bad points of your old shoes and take them in with you when you go to replace them. Discuss any specific problems you have and your training program with the sales person. Try several different brands/models on and walk around in them to make sure they fit well before deciding. Manufacturers design modern shoes so that they feel soft and comfortable underfoot when you first put them on, which, with the appearance, is part of the selling strategy. Only the experience of the first 50-100km will tell you whether you made a good choice or not, but consideration of the above issues should help you to do so.