How to Choose & Buy the Best Running, Athletic or Sports Shoes

As physical education teachers, we are concerned when students do not wear appropriate footwear. Inappropriate footwear can cause various injuries to feet, legs, bones and muscles, as well as many foot problems such as corns, bunions, calluses, plantar fascitis (inflammation of the soles of the feet), stress fractures and other conditions can be traced to wearing the wrong type of footwear which can cause lifelong injuries and problems with growth.

If you have several pairs of running shoes or other sports shoes, odds are that when you bought them, comfort and style were your main selection criteria. However, consider that about 25 percent of runners need some type of specialised shoe that is matched to their foot type, you may benefit from knowing your foot type before you buy your next pair of running shoes. Feet come in all shapes and sizes, but their structure tends to be grouped into the following categories.

Common Foot Types

- **Flat Feet** (0)
  Your foot is flat if you have no visible arch and your footprint is completely visible with no inward curve between the big toe and heel. (Footprint #3)

- **High Arches** (1)
  High arches are easy to spot. There is a clear arch between the heel and the ball of the foot. If your footprint has a large curve with a skinny outer edge, or perhaps an actual gap between the ball and the heel, you have a high arch. (Footprint #0 and #1)

- **Neutral Foot Type**
  A neutral foot type is neither flat-footed or high-arched. Your footprint will have a small inward curve of no more than an inch. (Footprint #2)

- **Overpronators** (2)
  Overpronators tend to roll inward from heel strike to take off during every stride. Those who pronate often need more stable running shoes.

- **Supinators** (3)
  Supinators tend to roll outward from heel strike to take off during every stride and need a flexible, cushioned shoe to absorb road shock while running.

How to Determine Your Foot Type

To learn your foot type you can do the footprint test and look at the the outline of your foot shape. About.com’s Running guide offers a great visual guide for determining your foot type with the footprint test.

You can also visit a local running shoe store and talk with the running experts. Many running stores now offer foot type analysis where you run across a computerized surface or run on a treadmill while their video tape your foot motion during running.
To determine your foot type at home, you can take a look at the soles of your current running shoes. The location of the wear can tell you if you land on the heels, roll in or out or have a neutral foot strike.

Next, place your shoes on a flat surface and look at them from behind. If the wear is on the inside of the heels, you likely need a more stable shoe to keep from pronating, or rolling inward as you run.

If the wear is on the outside of the heels, you may be a supinator, and roll to the outside. This is even more likely if you have high arches. In this case, you may benefit from shoes that have good cushioning and shock absorption.

When Buying Runners

When purchasing shoes, make sure to have both your feet measured, as your feet may be different sizes. Your feet expand during weight-bearing, so make sure you are standing when they are measured. In addition, your feet tend to swell and be at their largest at the end of the workday or after a workout, so you should try on shoes during these times. Wear athletic socks similar to those you will be wearing during your activity, and try on both shoes to check the fit. Make sure your heel fits snugly in each shoe and does not slip as you walk. Wiggle your toes; if you do not have a half-inch between your longest toe and the end of the shoe—approximately the width of your thumb—try a larger size. Lastly, test for comfort by walking or jogging a few steps as this will give you an idea of the shoes' comfort during activity.

The Five Shoe Types

There are basically five shoe types and what you buy depends upon your foot type and training needs

- **Motion-Control Shoes**
  These are the most rigid, durable, control-oriented running shoes that limit overpronation. Buy these shoes if you overpronate, you wear orthotics and want a stable shoe, or you have flat feet.

- **Stability Shoes**
  A good blend of cushioning, support and durability. Buy these shoes if you are of average weight and don't have any severe pronation or supination, but do need support and good durability.

- **Cushioned Shoes**
  The most cushioned shoes with the least support. Buy these shoes if you underpronate, have a rigid foot (high arch) and don't need any extra support.

- **Lightweight Training Shoes**
  The lightest of the training shoes designed for fast-paced training or racing. Buy these shoes if you have no motion-control problems and are a fast, efficient runner.

- **Trail Shoes**
  These shoes offer the best traction, with stability and durability. Buy these shoes if you run off-road or in inclement weather and need extra traction, more durable uppers and a thicker soled shoe.

When to Replace Running Shoes

Plan ahead and buy your next pair of shoes before your old pair wears out. Exercising in worn-out shoes can cause (or contribute to) injuries. It is recommended that you replace running
shoes between 9 – 12 months depending on your running style, body weight, and the surface on which you run.

Running Shoe Buying Tips

- Shop late in the day because your feet swell during the day.
- Measure your foot while standing.
- Try on both shoes with the socks you will wear.
- Buy shoes with laces
- Shoes need to have a comfortable sole, should at least be 2 -3 cm thick and have arch support
- Buy for your larger foot (feet are rarely the same exact size).
- Allow a thumbnail's width between the shoe and your big toe.
- Choose shoes that are comfortable immediately. If they hurt in the store, don't buy them.
- Look for a moderately priced shoe. Price is not necessarily an indication of quality. Research has shown that moderately priced running shoes work just as well as expensive ones.
- Make sure the shoe matches your foot type and running style.
- Wear new shoes around the house before using them on short runs.
- Don't do a long run in new shoes. Start out with a short run and stop if you have any hot spots, which are a warning sign that a blister is on the way.
- Consider having an evaluation by a doctor, physical therapist, or podiatrist to learn your foot type.

If anyone has any queries in regards to this, please do not hesitate to contact Mrs Shields or Miss Gilbert.