MaxFit
Movement Institute

How to buy a running shoe

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Purchasing a pair of running shoes is serious business. The mechanics of your foot and ankle can be affected considerably by the type of running shoe you use, which, in turn, can affect muscles, joints and ligaments that are higher up in the kinetic chain such as your knees, hips and low back.

A good running shoe should be built with light-weight material and must provide adequate shock absorption and motion control while retaining its flexibility to accommodate the foot as it propels the body through motion.

Here are four of my favourite tests you should use when buying a running shoe:

- The Dishrag Test – Place one of your hands at the front and the other at the rear of the shoe and then twist each end in the opposite direction. It is normal for the shoe to have capability to twist slightly but, if you can wring it out like a dishrag, it will not have adequate motion control.
- The Pinch Test – Grasp the shoe just above the mid-sole using your index finger and thumb at the area of the heel counter. Ideally, a rigid heel counter is what you are looking for as this stabilizes the rear-foot, which in turn ensures forefoot stability.
- The Fold Test – This test involves attempting to bend the shoe so that it folds in half. If it indeed folds in half, it will not provide stability through the mid-foot. Your shoe must have flexibility in the forefoot so you can generate power for propulsion when toeing off. Ideally, you want the shoe to fold at the ball of the foot (metatarsal heads) at an angle of 30 degrees. If the shoe is too stiff, more force is required to bend the shoe and this results in fatigued muscles and shin splints.
- The Shelf Test – This one is easy and only requires observation. Place the shoes on a shelf so that you can get a good look at them from behind. Notice if they are slanting inwards or outwards. If they are slanted, this puts your feet at a disadvantage from the start. The back of the heel should bisect the mid-sole and both shoes should be symmetrical.

Remember, your running shoe should have adequate cushioning in order to protect the joints of the kinetic chain above. But if there is too much cushioning, the shoe will "bottom out," so look for an optimal amount.

Also, compare the weight of the shoes as an increase of 100 grams per shoe on each foot increases the energy expenditure by 1 per cent, which contributes to on to two extra minutes to complete a marathon.

So next time you are in the market for a new pair of running shoes, try these tips and make an informed choice.