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Walking

What type of foot do I have?

I mentioned that you can tell by the wear pattern of your shoes if you pronate or supinate. You can also ask a salesperson at a reputable shoe store to evaluate your gait and foot strike, or you can have your doctor or podiatrist do this. You can also try the wet test at home. To do it, wet your bare foot and then step on a piece of paper or other surface that will show your footprint. Stand normally when you do this with slight pressure toward the front of your foot. You're a pronator if most of your foot hits the floor, a supinator if very little of your foot hits the floor, and neutral if the foot print is somewhere between pronation and supination.

What type of shoe should I buy?

Footwear for your foot type

One of the pluses of walking is that you don't need lots of fancy equipment, but shoes can make a difference. There are many athletic shoe types to choose from: running, walking, cross-training, etc. I suggest the obvious for walking, a walking shoe. Walking shoes typically have heels and toes that are rounded up to reduce impact on heel strike and increase energy during push-off. Here's how to decide what type of walking shoe to buy depending on your foot type and your foot strike.

If you over pronate and have flat feet, avoid shoes with excessive cushioning because they lack stability and motion control. Shoes that feel as soft as bedroom slippers, lack support, or are excessively bouncy are not a good choice for over-pronators. Instead, purchase shoes with firm midsoles and pronation-control features. I also recommend over-the-counter full-length arch supports for over-pronators. They can decrease pressure by as much as 33%. Powerfeet and Superfeet full-length insoles are two good choices and can be located online.

If you supinate and have high arches, purchase cushioned shoes that do not limit motion. Your foot doesn't shock absorb very well if you have high arches and you supinate, and too much stability and control in the shoe will decrease shock absorption even more.

If you have a neutral foot, you can wear any type of shoe that feels comfortable. Your foot strike is efficient with a healthy amount of arch support and shock absorption when your foot is neutral.

Important note: Speak with your doctor or consult with a podiatrist if your feet hurt. It will be difficult to stay motivated to walk if your feet hurt. Your doctor can help.

Shoe shopping basics for everyone

Here are some tips that everyone should follow when buying walking shoes:

1. The sole of a walking shoe should be flexible with more bend in the toe than a running shoe. You will be more likely to get blisters if the shoe is too stiff. Make sure you can bend and twist the toe area of your walking shoe.
2. Breathable shoes are more comfortable. Mesh fabrics are better than leather, and they're lighter, too.
3. Shoes should always feel comfortable right away—there's no "breaking in" period. Don't buy shoes if seams or stitching can be felt. This can cause blisters, calluses or other injuries.
4. Feet swell during the day so get fitted for walking shoes at the end of the day when your foot is its largest.
5. Wear the socks you normally wear when walking. Synthetic socks made of polypropylene or other synthetics are better than cotton because they don't compress, they dry quickly, they wick moisture away from the foot, they prevent blisters, and the heel is padded. Ask at your shoe store for walking socks.
6. Allow one-half inch between the end of your longest toe and the shoe's end, with wiggle room for all toes.
7. The shoe should be as wide as possible across the forefoot without allowing heel slippage. Experiment with the lacing to get a proper fit if necessary.
8. Always try on both shoes before making purchase. Buy the larger size if one foot is larger than the other.
9. Replace your walking shoes when they no longer support your feet. You'll know your current shoe is worn down if you take them to the shoe store and feel the difference when you compare them to a new pair.
10. Find a reputable shoe store in your area to buy your shoes.