

Shoes

According To Mama Hobbit

Warning – being able to write everything I want to without word or time constraints has caused this to be quite long – you might want to get your beverage of choice and a donut (or piece of fruit if you're trying to cut down on the sugar/fat intake).

Shoes, shoes, shoes - for those of you who haven't joined the minimalist movement and are still keeping that shoe between your foot and the pavement, they are your most important piece of running or walking equipment. The half marathon build up schedule is coming to a close and the marathon athletes are in their 5th week of the official training schedule. If you dusted off those old tennis shoes way back in your closet and started training in them, you might want to give them a really hard look before you get further into those long long distances – double digit mileages are just around the corner.

Tom says you can do 3-4 miles in just about anything (he's finished his race and come back and walked the last 2 miles or so with me while he was wearing his Crocs, so he ought to know), but when you get into the longer mileages, you definitely want to have a shoe that fits your foot.



If you are new to the sport of endurance running and walking, we recommend that, when possible, you go to a specialty running store for help fitting your shoes. This can be a stressful experience (I mean chocolate therapy stressful). First of all, most of us don't consider ourselves "real" runners. And heaven forbid if you're a walker-walkers usually take a very apologetic attitude into the running store (and I'm allowed to comment on that as I'm a walker). I don't know how many times I've heard, "Well, I'm only walking the marathon." Or the half marathon, or the 10k, or the 100 miler – if I hear someone say that and I know them, they get a large dose of me on my soapbox about respecting yourself if you're training to walk a half marathon or marathon and if I don't know them, I bite my tongue – sometimes. Most runners aren't any better, whatever pace you run, it seems if you were just a little bit faster you'd be a "real" runner. But, I digress. **EVERYONE**, whether running or walking, needs the right shoes to make it through the training schedule and the race. Most of the marathon and half marathon walkers I know wear running shoes. However, if you're a walker who just can't imagine putting on a pair of running shoes and your walking shoes work very well for you in the training mileages, then stick with what works for you. If you're not sure what kind of shoe you'll need for training, don't automatically go to the walking shoes just because you're not a "runner".

If you've never been into a specialty running store, let me set the scene for you. It's usually a smaller space in a shopping center or strip mall (not a big mega store) that is packed with all kinds of stuff – some of which is totally foreign to you. Sure, you recognize socks (when did they start making them in left and right?) and shoes, but what are those little packets that look like condiments and why would you want to buy anything that looks like stick deodorant in a running store? It has been my experience that running stores are usually either extremely busy or quiet as a tomb. If you're already self-conscious about trying to buy shoes (remember, that whole I'm not really a runner attitude?) walking into either of these scenes can cause major panic. If the store is full of folks, it seems like everyone knows everyone else and they're all talking about their split times or their last race or their next race or what pre-run meal works best for them. You don't know anyone to talk to and you don't know what they're talking about and you feel like you stand out in the crowd. If the store is totally empty, the folks who are ready and willing to help you all look at you and you ARE the crowd and you totally stand out as a fraud that knows nothing. Okay, maybe I'm projecting my own feelings from the first few times I went in to buy shoes and no one else feels like this. I do know from experience and from watching other "newbies" that we don't want to be a lot of trouble, we don't want to have our foot measured, we don't want to let them watch us run or walk, and we don't want to open our mouths and let everyone know how inexperienced we are at this whole process. We point to the first shoe that catches our eye, ask for the size we usually wear, pay for them, and off we go.

Trust me, the folks at the specialty running stores want you to be a lot of trouble (okay, maybe not a LOT of trouble, but they are more than happy to take all the time you need to make sure the shoes you walk out of the store with are the ones you really need). A word to the wise – going to shop for running shoes is like going to the doctor or the bank – don't try to do it when you're in a hurry.

A checklist for finding your perfect shoe:

1. Shop for running shoes after you've been out training or at the end of the day when you've been on your feet. Some swelling of your feet is normal when you've been running or walking for awhile, so you want to mimic training and race conditions.
2. Let them measure your foot. One of the biggest complaints we hear from runners and walkers is that they finish their race and lose a toenail or two (or three). Believe me, the first time that happens to you, it's really kind of freaky – your toenail turns black and you're not sure what the heck is going on. The most common cause of losing toenails after a long run or a

race is the toe box of your shoe being too small. For whatever reason, running shoes generally run smaller than street shoes (I wear a size 5 1/2-6 in a street shoe, but a 7 1/2 in a running shoe). You don't want your toe to beat against the end or the top of the shoe. Remember – it's just a number and unlike blue jeans or bowling shoes, the size shoe you're wearing isn't somewhere on the outside of the shoe for all the world to see.

3. If you have shoes you've been training in, bring your old shoes along – seeing the wear patterns on your old shoes helps them see exactly how your foot strikes.
4. The person helping you should watch you run and walk in the shoes you try on. Most of them will watch you run and/or walk so much that you'll wish you'd thought to measure the distance so you can count it in your training mileage for the day. If possible, it's always good to wear shorts or roll up your pants so they can get a clear view of what your foot is doing.
5. If possible, take the socks that you're going to be wearing to train in; socks are another very important piece of equipment, so you'll know how the shoes and the socks feel together.
6. If the shoes pinch, rub, or just don't feel right – do NOT buy them. You should not have to “break” in your running shoes. While we don't ever want you to go out and do a double-digit mileage run in a brand new pair of shoes – you should be able to without doing any damage to your feet. If the shoe doesn't feel right in the store, it won't get better the more miles you put on it.
7. Remember, not all brands of shoes (or models of the same brand) are created equal for all feet. Just because your cousin's boyfriend's sister's best friend is a really fast runner and swears by a particular brand of shoe, that doesn't mean it will work for you. Try on every shoe they have in your size that they think will work best for you – don't get your mind set on a particular brand just because it's the name you've heard the most.
8. Ask the salesperson what kind of return policy they have. Most running stores will let you return the shoes if you haven't worn them outside and if they have a minimum amount of mileage on them. If you've worn them for a 3 miler on the treadmill and you realize they just aren't going to work at all, you will probably be able to return them. If you've put 85 miles on them and part of that was a 12 miler in the pouring rain, not so much, those puppies are yours.
9. If you go to a specialty store and the clerk has spent a lot of time and effort helping you find the right shoe, please, please, please buy those shoes from that store. Don't leave after using their knowledge and go home and order the shoes on the Internet. I'm not saying you should never buy shoes on the internet, I'm just saying that part of what the specialty shoe stores can provide you is individual attention and if you've used their service and it was beneficial, they ought to at least get your first purchase.
10. Murphy's Law – the shoe that will feel the absolute best on your foot is almost ALWAYS the ugliest shoe in the store. Remember, just like the shoe size, it's all about the fit and once you run through the rain and the mud, it will just be a dirty gray anyway...

Just as everyone is individual in what shoe will fit their foot, the same is true of how long your shoes will last. What “they” (whoever they are) say, is your shoes should last anywhere from 3-6 months or 300-500 miles (if you're going by mileage). Most of the athletes I've talked to have said they get closer to 350-400 miles on their shoes. I, personally, get right at 283 miles (weird, I know, but I can track it almost to the mile), which means I change running shoes closer to every 2 ½ - 3 months. When you find the shoe that you absolutely love, I can tell you that you need to buy at least 2 pairs for the training season, if possible. It IS an absolute law that they will change the shoe you love about every 12-18 months. For the Little Rock Marathon, one pair of shoes will take you from the build up till about the end of January. The 20 miler will be mid-February and you're going to want to have another pair of shoes waiting in the wings to wear from about 2 weeks before the 20 miler. The second pair will be the ones you wear on race day. An easy way to keep up with the mileage on your shoes is to take a laundry marker and write the date they were put in service on the heel of your shoe. Since I KNOW that you're all keeping up with your mileage, you can simply go back to that day and figure up how many miles your shoes have on them at any given point-only do this after you're sure you won't be returning the shoes to the store. (Or, you could have a spreadsheet that keeps up with your daily mileage and which pair of shoes you were wearing for that training.) Again, it just needs to be something that works for you.

You'll usually know your shoes are worn out when your knees and/or hips begin to hurt. That seems to be the signal for most of us to check the mileage on our shoes. Hot and cold extremes can also shorten the life of your shoes, so leaving them in the trunk of your car all day before or after your run isn't the best thing to do. Most runners agree you can wash your shoes, but do not put them in the dryer. After washing them, stuff them with newspaper to dry them out – be sure the insoles are out – change the newspaper as it soaks up the water. Also, remember to put the insoles back in when your shoes are dry and before you head out for your next run. The newspaper trick also works if you've had a run in the rain. Another school of thought says you shouldn't wash your shoes as the washing machine breaks them down – Tom washes his nasty trail shoes in the shower and uses the newspaper trick to dry them out. I don't usually have to wash my shoes before I need a new pair (and neither Tom nor the dog has complained about the smell yet).