

Sole Facts

Walking is simple, generally safe, easy to do, and requires no special equipment except for walking shoes. By starting slowly and progressing gradually, you will increase endurance. Add a stretching routine to increase flexibility and a few muscle strengthening exercises, and you will have a good physical activity program for little money.

Good walking shoes are needed to help prevent injuries. Walking shoes are designed to provide rigidity, durability, flexibility, proper fit, adequate cushioning, and comfort. The most important consideration should be a good fit when buying walking shoes. They should be comfortable from the moment they are put on.

Consider the following points when choosing walking shoes.

- **Support.** The construction of the back and heel of the shoe should provide stability and control of foot movement and protect the Achilles tendon from injury.
- **Cushioning.** Good cushioning in the heel and midsole is important. Walking

shoes should be flexible; however, they should be slightly more rigid than a running shoe to permit rolling off the toes and joints rather than bending through them. (Dr. Martin Wichmann. "Athletic Shoes: Finding the Right Fit." *The Physician and Sports Medicine* 21:204–211, 1993.)

- **Performance.** Walking shoes that are lightweight and durable are preferred. Consider traction for the surface you will be walking on. The shoe should be made of material that will breathe, such as nylon mesh. This type of material will allow the sweat to evaporate.
- **Fit.** Shoes that fit correctly will make walking more fun.

Tips:

- Shop late in the day when your feet are the biggest.
- Wear the same type of socks you will normally wear when walking.
- The toe box of the shoe should be large enough for you to wiggle your toes and about a thumbnail longer than your longest toe.
- Feel inside for seams and ridges.
- The shoes should bend easily at their widest part.
- Walk briskly around the store to check for comfort and cushioning.
- Make sure the shoes feel good on your feet.