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## Running Shoes: How to Invest in the Perfect Pair



As every runner knows, the correct shoe is fundamental to any training regime and subsequent competitive performance. For runners - both seasoned and new - selecting a new set of high-performing running shoes is a significant investment, and should be fully informed in order to make the correct choice for your personal needs.

Whilst it may be easy to rely on a trusty old pair of shoes, incorrect footwear can significantly increase your risk of injury and undermine your training and athletic performance efforts. Taking the effort to be expertly assessed and fitted for the correct shoe is a wise investment for both your health and performance.

Ever wondered what makes a shoe the correct shoe for you? What effects your personal requirements, and what should you be specifically seeking when investing in the perfect kit? We spoke with running shoe expert Neil Fetherby from Sportlink Running & Fitness about the importance of correctly selecting the right running shoe.

**Q. Many sports apparel retailers now offer a gait analysis service. Why is gait analysis important?**

A. Gait Analysis provides runners with important information about their running style so as to help and advice each person select the correct type of shoe. Whilst running we can take well over one hundred strides per minute at a force equal to approximately three times our own body weight with each stride.

During longer distance runs most people are more likely to land on the outside area of the heel whereby the foot then roll inwards and forwards termed as pronation. This is a natural movement whereby the foot distributes and disperses the impact forces. However and with a high degree of people, signs of over moderate to excessive rolling inwards occurs where the foot rolls inward too far causing the arch to collapse under the pressure of the impact forces.

This is termed as overpronation. Sometimes and particularly if the shoe is too soft this movement is exaggerated and caused by the shoe itself. A bare foot Gait Analysis will accurately measure the natural degree of pronation of the feet along with leg and body movements for which the correct footwear can then be advised for each person. When overpronation is diagnosed, it is advisable to wear shoes which offer support along the medial section of the shoe.

However some shoes offer more support than others and whilst it is advisable to wear shoes that counteract inward rolling, it is important to have an understanding as to the levels of overpronation hence why Video Gait Analysis is important. All out staff at Sportlink have qualifications whereby they have the knowledge, experience and background to accurately assess each individual.

We also take into consideration each person's, body shape and history of running and injuries. Underpronation (Supination) is when the feet don't roll in enough i.e. too much lateral movement upon the foot making contact with the ground. This type of runner will obviously require neutral type running shoes with the emphasis being on cushioning and shock absorption as opposed to that of shock absorption and medial support.

**Q. What are the most important considerations when investing in new running shoes?**

A. That they are the right ones for you - considering biomechanics, terrain, and the nature of your running training schedule. However and whilst it is important to tick all the boxes by way of ensuring the shoe offers plenty of shock absorption, cushioning and pronation support if required, the most important box to tick is that of comfort.

Once you have purchased a pair of shoes which have been recommended for your specific running needs, make sure that it is also the shoe of your choice as if it's not comfortable then say so before buying as who wants to run mile after mile in a shoe that doesn't feel right. If in doubt then leave it out!

**Q. How often should running shoes be replaced? Is there a recommended rule for everyone?**

A. The rule of thumb is usually approximately 500 miles, but that is just a rough guide. Needless to say that someone who weighs 15 stone is going to put more pressure on the midsole than someone who weighs 8 stone and when you consider that there is approximately three times your body weight being absorbed through the midsole with each stride the heavier person is going to break down the cushioning and shock absorption properties much quicker.

The foams used can also differ particularly with some of the more lightweight and lower budget shoes. I always liken it to having a Yorkie chocolate bar in one hand and an Aero chocolate bar in the other. They may look similar on the outside, but when you cut them in half the Aero bar is light and fluffy and the Yorkie far more dense which of course will last longer.

At the end of the day you will usually know - i.e. when your current running shoes suddenly feel flat and hard when training. Something else which confuses some novice runners is the limited wear on the outer-sole which lasts far longer than the midsole. If the outersole has worn out then the midsole is normally long past its best before date.