Choosing the Right Shoe for Your Sport

The most important aspect of sport shoe selection is finding the proper fit. The second most important issue relates to selecting shoes based on their design characteristics.

An illustrative example is when young athletes run track in basketball shoes. Their rationale is that running is part of basketball, so why not save money by using the same shoes for track. What is not appreciated by these athletes is that track shoes differ from basketball shoes in such features as cushioning, support and weight. Track shoes are designed to protect athletes from stresses unique to track; while the converse is true about basketball shoes. Each sport places different demands on the musculoskeletal system, and the manufacturers of sports shoes have consulted with experts in the field of biomechanics to craft shoes with this in mind.

Our sports medicine physicians suggest using the following checklist when selecting sport-specific shoes:

**Running**
- Good shock absorption
- Rigid heel counter
- Good flexibility at the mid-foot
- Good traction
- Protect the foot

Trail runners buy trail running shoes, which offer better traction features and wider toe boxes. Runners who do a lot of racing may choose a lightweight racing shoe but should probably wear shoes with more support and stability for the majority of their training runs.

**Field Sport**
- Sport-specific cleat or tread
- Match cleat length to conditions on the playing surface
- The longer the cleat, the higher incidence of injury
- Use stiffer-soled shoes on artificial playing surfaces

**Indoor Court**
- Cup-soled shoes provide stable base for foot allowing forward/side movement
- Use rubber or rubber-blend soles on hardwood floors
- Use polyurethane or rubber-blend soles on synthetic floors
- Leather high tops provide added ankle support*

*Since the most common basketball injury is a sprained ankle, one of the main goals of basketball shoes is ankle support. While controversy exists over whether high-top basketball shoes actually prevent injury, research exists suggesting that this design provides a measure of psychological support and increases an athlete’s awareness of foot and ankle position during play.

Call 330.835.5533 to make an appointment or visit summahealth.org/sportsmedicine for more information.
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Additional advice regarding high-top basketball shoes

Some high-top basketball shoes sold today are designed more for fashion than function. Basketball shoes intended to withstand the demands of competitive basketball play are classified as “performance models.” The main features of these performance models are:

• Upper leather for longer-lasting support and durability
• Notches in the eyestay system (the points where laces attach to the shoe) to provide more flexibility
• Padding in the ankle collar to provide support against side-to-side movements and pivoting.

Some basketball shoes have special features that provide even more stability (and theoretically greater protection from injury):

• Inner boot, which is a strap system that extends up the ankle. (It is laced separately from the upper and provides a more snug fit than the ankle collar alone, limits excess motion and may increase the proprioceptive sense.)
• External support straps to increase ankle support. (These are typically made of a firmer material than the upper of the shoe.)

Outdoor sports

• Preferably, use rubber-blend base while playing tennis on grass
• Use polyurethane outer soles and mid-soles on abrasive surfaces

Once proper athletic footwear has been purchased, allow time for shoes to be broken in prior to practices and games. Have your child wear the shoes in the house (unless cleated) to help break them and to prevent blisters once the shoes are used in sports. Runners should not go on a long run nor race the first time they use new running shoes. Finally, encourage athletes not to wear game/practice shoes outside their of sport in order to lengthen the life of the shoes and to maintain proper function of athletic shoes.

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