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## Get a Perfect Fit for Your Kicks

By Debbie DeAngelo  
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Sneakers. Tennis Shoes. Kicks. Whatever you prefer to call them, they're all monikers for our favorite shoes. The first rubber-soled pair was introduced in 1917 by the U.S. Rubber Company, and was designed for tennis players ... thus, tennis shoes. The term "sneakers" originated from the rubber soles allowing people to walk quietly or sneak. We've come a long way since that original pair. As science has advanced, so has sneaker technology. Given the estimation that the average person walks 115,000 miles in their lifetime, finding the right fit is essential.

## Stepping in the Right Direction

What's the most important feature when buying sneakers? Well, it's not the color, cool-factor, or celebrity endorsement. Once upon a time, people owned one pair of generic sneakers and used them for everything. Not anymore. There are several aspects to consider when culling through the variety of brands and styles. Here are five characteristics to evaluate when making your decision.

**Purpose.** The \$72 billion worldwide sneaker industry has a pair for every occasion. Sneakers have become very specialized and activity specific. The same shoe you would wear for walking may not be the best choice for playing pickleball. Sport-specific shoes factor in the movement of the activity and how to best support your feet and prevent injuries.

**Fit.** Size, a standard measurement, is not the same thing as fit, the personal comfort of the shoe. The ideal scenario is to be fitted in person first. Once you've found a good fit, then you have more flexibility when ordering replacements. Generally, the best fit for an athletic shoe is half to a full size larger than a dress shoe. Remember, it's not about the size, it's about the fit. It's important to ensure there's adequate room in the toe box, so allow for about one-half inch between your longest toe and the front of the shoe. If not, your toes will jam into the front of the shoe when you walk.

Be sure the shoe bends at the toe box because it's the natural way the foot bends when pushing off your toes. If you have two different size feet, fit according to the larger one. Also, your shoes don't need "broken in." They should be comfortable when you try them on and walk around the store. Shop later in the day when your feet are at their largest due to any swelling. Be sure to wear or bring a pair of socks that you would typically use with your sneakers when trying on new ones.

**Support.** Do you have flat feet? High arches? Pronation problems? Conditions like these dictate the type of support you need. Attributes of the sneaker to consider include arch support, heel cushioning, collar thickness (padding around the ankle) and drop (difference in height from the front to the back of the sneaker). Keep in mind that as sneakers breakdown and wear, the support wanes too. If the sides or the soles are worn down or if you develop pain in your body while wearing them, then they need to be replaced. It's suggested that you replace running or walking shoes every 300 to 500 miles.

**Construction.** This is an important but often overlooked feature. The sneaker's upper part should be breathable, so air circulates, and moisture doesn't collect. (This speaks to the odorific factor too!). Lightweight materials include mesh or knit fabric. Midsoles should be thick and cushioned. That's why they usually

consist of gel and air pockets. The outsoles are made from rubber for traction and durability.

**Price.** A high quality, durable, supportive pair of sneakers won't be a cheap date; however, I think it's worth the investment in your body. Having said that, they shouldn't break the bank either. There are plenty of great options that fit a variety of budgets.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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