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Choosing the Right Footwear

Make sure that when you exercise you do it safely and don't leave yourself at risk of injury. Different sports and types of exercise incorporate different dynamic movements, all of which could result in aches, pains, sprains and even fractures as a result of overload on the tissues with a lack of shock absorption and subsequent mechanical stress up through the body. The right shoes for an activity ensure that feet function at optimum efficiency to absorb shock as it's transmitted through our bones, ligaments and tendons with each movement.

Modern sports shoes are made of hi tech materials that have been developed on the basis of millions of pounds worth of research to ensure maximum performance with minimum risk of injury. This has resulted in the diverse range of shoes now available, so it is vital that you buy the shoe that is designed specifically for the activity you want to do:

Running shoes – Generally they tend to be very flexible, enabling the foot to bend and flex through each step. As running mainly involves moving forwards at varying speeds, rather than stepping sideways, (i.e. like in tennis or aerobics), running shoes are not really suitable for activities involving side to side movements as they leave the ankle complex vulnerable to sprains and strains. If you suffer from ankle pain or injury, it may be because you are wearing shoes too flexible for your activity!



Cross training shoes - these are much stiffer and provide greater support for the foot when sideways movements are made. This means that they can be used across a range of activities. The downside is a loss of flexibility across the ball of the foot & the toes, which means that the muscles and other soft tissue structures in the foot & leg have to work harder to bend the foot in the shoe when running. This type of shoe is ideal for gym work!

Court shoes - these are specifically designed for tennis, basketball etc, and fall somewhere between the latter, giving a combination of flexibility and sideways support for the unpredictable movement associated with these types of activity.

Fitness shoes - these are designed for exercise classes i.e. aerobics, which incorporate impact and combine flexibility with support as well as cushioning to lessen the effect of shock generated during high impact work.

Individual Considerations

The vast majority of individuals have misalignments with their skeletal structure and therefore different people experience different levels of support/compensation with their feet. Some people's feet will flatten out excessively when weight bearing, a movement of

the joints within the foot known as *pronation*, and others will have high arched feet where the joints are in a position known as *supination*.

Pronators – people with this type of foot will benefit from a shoe that supports that inner border of the foot

Supinators – people with this type of foot are less flexible and so inner border cushioning is less important. However, this type of foot needs much more cushioning in the shoe to compensate for the lack of natural shock absorption caused by the relative rigidity of the joints within the foot.

Try this: *If you're not sure what foot pattern you have look at your wet footprints when you get out of the bath or shower. Notice how much or how little of your instep is clear in your footprint!*

