



Bill Martin of Endurance House in Middleton works with Mary Jorgensen to find the best fitting shoe for her activities.

These Shoes Are Made for ...

Walking, running or hitting the gym, find your best fit

Story by Amanda N. Wegner / Photos by Shanna Wolf

If this is the summer you run a race or take up the latest fitness craze, give yourself a smart start with the right shoes. “If you start on a program and get injured, it puts you right back at square one,” says Anne Stancil, general manager of Fleet Feet Sports Madison. “It’s going to make a real difference if you’re in the right shoe, a comfortable shoe.” And with a rich selection of stores offering sport-specific shoes, it’s easy to find the pair that works best for you.

Science of shoe selection

There is a science to choosing the right shoe, and a professional fitting offers the best lesson.

After asking questions about your goals and running habits, Endurance House uses footstrike analysis to help you choose the right shoe. Justin Pernitz, operations manager at Endurance House, explains that footstrike analysis uses high-end digital video (in conjunction with a treadmill) to assess how the foot interacts with the ground while running or walking.

“We’re approaching things from ground up; how your movement and body mechanics impact the ground and load bodyweight, things you can’t look at in a static environment. With this information, we can find which family of shoe would be the most appropriate for you.”

At Fleet Feet, their FITlosophy is similar, minus the digital video. Staffers start by measuring the foot and assess pronation and flexibility. From there, they suggest a few shoes to try, then have you actually run or walk around with them.

Mary Jorgensen knows the value of running in the right shoes. Last year, a little before her 40th birthday, she decided to start training for a 5K. Initially, she was running in cross-trainers, but a trip to Fleet Feet set her straight. “I was not in the right shoes,” says Mary, who now has a few 5Ks under her belt and is signed up for

Madison Marathon’s half-marathon this month. “It’s really valuable to know what shoes are best for you.”

What makes a good shoe?

Not all shoes are created equal, so it’s critical to match your shoe to your activity. For linear sports, such as running, walking, cycling or using an elliptical, choose running or walking shoes, because they offer more flexibility, says Bryan Heiderscheit, an associate professor at UW-Madison who focuses on biomechanics and gait and formerly consulted for shoe companies.

For aerobics like step, Zumba or BOSU, choose a cross-trainer. These shoes offer more lateral (side) stability and have a smoother sole to more easily move across a studio floor. If you’re taking up running or walking, a flexible shoe

is important, says Bryan. “We’re finding that stiffer, more-controlling footwear is not the best idea. You want to be able to move freely.”

Justin, Anne and Bryan also unanimously agree that comfort is paramount.

“The number one thing with footwear is that it should be comfortable, even after you get a few weeks of wear in the shoe,” says Bryan.

“We preach that the shoe should disappear under your foot,” says Justin. “Footwear that’s distracting or hurts the body or foot will keep you from enjoying the activity.”

And finding the most comfortable shoe is achievable with a professional fitting (typically there is no charge for these fittings, which are available on a walk-in basis). “You get a more personalized level of service by coming to a specialty store like ours,” says Anne. “It’s really worth the time.” *mb*

5 Shoe Surprises



1. Transitioning from supportive “street” shoes to flexible running shoes can be problematic. Bryan recommends transitioning slowly, over several weeks, even months.
2. Don’t be surprised if the staffer suggests a larger size. The feet can swell during activity, and Justin says they often size up workout shoes a half size to one-and-one-half sizes.
3. Women, don’t buy men’s shoes. The shape, arch and other support elements of a man’s shoe are not congruent to a woman’s foot.
4. Department store vs. specialty store? “Shoe companies,” says Anne, “save their best designs and materials for stores like ours. A \$40 pair of New Balance shoes from the department store, for example, are different than \$100 New Balance shoes from here.” Specialty stores have the top-of-the-line shoes in terms of durability, fit and comfort.
5. Running shoes are good for walking, but walking-specific shoes don’t return the favor. If you’re doing both, go with runners.

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