

## IF THE SHOE FITS....

Have you ever been in the dilemma of choosing the proper footwear for both athletic and everyday activity? An improper shoe fit may not only be ignorance on the part of the consumer but the manufacturer may be at fault as well. Here are some important tips and considerations to aid you in the purchasing of the correct shoe to fit your needs.

First you should determine the proper length and width of your foot. Make sure you measure both feet, as one may be longer than the other. Then fit the shoe to the larger of the two. When trying shoes on, stand up bearing full weight in the shoe. Extra strain will be put on the arch if the shoe is too narrow. The foot should not bulge over the seams nor should the outer part of your foot hang over the sole. On the other hand, if the shoe is too wide, several wrinkles will appear on top of the shoe. You should never have to stretch a shoe out to ensure proper fit.

The toe box or top part of your shoe where your toes rest is also an important area. It should be wide enough that it doesn't push your toes inward. There should also be sufficient space to allow proper extension of all the toes when pushing off. To ensure this, allow approximately ½ inch space between your big toe and the end of the shoe.

Too much room in this area could cause instability of the forefoot leading to other problems.

Another key area one can evaluate on their own is the flexibility of their shoe. By pushing the toebox of the shoe backwards you can tell what how much or how little flexibility there is in the forefoot and midfoot regions. The forefoot region should have adequate flexibility to allow for the natural fulcrum of the foot and the midfoot region should be more rigid to provide arch support during push off. Ideally, one with higher arches should look for a shoe with softer more cushion like arch supports, while one with flatter feet should look for a shoe with more rigid supports or even consider arch inserts. These should also be transferred to cleats as they often have poor support and cushion.

The heel counter is of utmost importance when choosing a shoe, especially if you have a history of heel or achilles problems. This is the part of the shoe that prevents rotation and slippage of your heel. The heel counter should be firm enough to cradle your heel and not produce unnecessary rubbing resulting in blisters. An easy way to check the stability of the heel counter is to place the shoe on a flat surface and view it from the rear. Then, take a pen or a pencil and push it against the heel in an attempt to tip the shoe over. If the shoe tips over without much force, then it's probably a poorly constructed heel counter. You want to find a shoe that produces very little lateral movement of the shoe when the pencil test is applied.

Finally, here are some simple tips to remember when actually shopping for that new pair. One should shop for shoes near the end of the day, as feet tend to be a little larger at this time. Wear the socks that you would wear with that shoe. Be careful to observe defects in the construction and workmanship of the shoe such as poor stitching. Don't get sucked in by the popularity of a specific shoe. Choose the shoe that feels comfortable for you and one that is designed for activities that you have in mind. Avoid certain gimmicks such as flared heels, torsion bars, pumps or lights as they may be appropriate for some but not for you. If you finally find that great pair, take note of its qualities. You can almost be assured that same brand's next generation of shoe will fit you just as well once you decide to purchase again.