

The Running Shoe for You  
By Aaron Lehr, SPT



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When people ask me about what running shoe is the best, I respond, "it depends...". In my experience, I never say that there is one "best" shoe. Rather, there is a great variety and unique characteristics that make each shoe specifically tailored to the needs of the individual's foot. A shoe that works great for one person may not be the shoe for the other person. For example, I wear the Asics 2130™. But just because I wear that shoe that does not necessarily make it the best shoe out of all running shoes. Rather, it is the best shoe for me. When I say the best shoe for me, there are a few components I take into consideration when I make that selection: support, cushion and cost. There are other components that are important as well, but these are the three main ones that I find important when selecting running shoes for myself and others.

**Support:** The important aspect with this is to know whether you need a posted shoe or not. A "post" is a denser portion of the midsole that you will find on the inside arch section of the shoe. This is placed there for people who "overpronate", a condition where the arch of your foot collapses excessively. Pronation of the foot is a normal and natural process to aid with absorbing compressive loading during foot strike. Too much of it allows for poor biomechanics and can possibly lead to injury. The post then allows for the shoe itself to help limit this overpronation and place less stress on the foot structures. The amount of posting you require depends on how much you overpronate.

**Cushion:** This is the meat portion of the shoe. First you have the midsole with either ethylene vinyl acetate (EVA), polyurethane (PU) or a combination of the two. Then you may or may not have the brand specific cushioning component within this midsole. The classic example is Nike Air®. The special cushioning component allows for added cushioning in the heel and/or forefoot where pressure is usually the greatest. Good cushioning is most required for those that, "underpronate", a condition where your arch of your foot does not collapse at all and stays rigidly high, limiting your foot's ability to absorb shock. If your foot is not able to pronate to absorb the compressive loading during foot strike, it will be important to make sure the shoe has good cushioning to help absorb the shock.

**Cost:** Normally, as a shoe gets more technologically advanced, the cost does go up. But, just because a shoe is expensive, that does not make it the best shoe for you. First, you may be paying for hype. Second, you may not need that much technology in a shoe. Third, it may not even be that comfortable for you. You always need to weigh how much you are willing to pay versus what you require from running shoes. In one respect, it is the most important running equipment you will need. But if you like to keep your shoes up-to-date, you will probably be purchasing them every two to six months, depending on your running. A tip to help get the more advanced shoes at a lower cost is to look for sales, go online or ask for the previous year's models, as these do not lose their quality just because they are a year or two old.

On the other hand, be wary because, “you pay for what you get.” Purchasing a specific brand - let’s say New Balance® - at a major retail store or mall may not be the same quality of a New Balance® shoe purchased at an athletic or running specialty store. Keep in mind that shoe companies make many styles of shoes and to make them more cost-effective, they can limit how much technology they place within a shoe. This is where the less expensive shoe may or may not have the specific cushioning component. If you require a good quality shoe with proper posting and cushioning, you may not be getting it for the \$39.99 special. Now, that does not make it a bad shoe, but just be aware that it may not be giving you the proper cushioning and support you need.

I will then sum-up everything into a phrase I use when discussing running shoes: the “fit and feel.” If a shoe does not feel comfortable when trying it on at the store, it will not be any better when running. Be sure to try on a variety of shoes and brands. Brands vary in how they are sized- up and designed. Trying on different brands gives you a sense as to how the shoe feels and if something is uncomfortable. Most of the time, a specific brand just seems to work with your foot-type.

Understand that everyone has a unique foot structure. Running shoe companies understand this and are constantly updating the technology in their shoes to accommodate and make their shoes more individualistic rather than a “one-shoe-fits-all.” I have discussed a few key points on the selection of running shoes and hope that assists you. Understand that sometimes finding the perfect running shoe is by trial and error. Please do not hesitate to get assistance when shopping around. A running specialty store is a good first stop since they are well trained on this matter. You may also ask your health care professional about the characteristics in a shoe they recommend depending on your foot structure. Running shoes are not just shoes; they are technologically advanced pieces of equipment. Choose wisely and happy running.

If you would like to contact me with further questions or comments, please email me at [arlehr@oakland.edu](mailto:arlehr@oakland.edu).



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