

It Must Be the Shoes!

By Terri Rejimbal, RRCA Certified Run Coach

As runners we don't need much equipment to perform our sport, but a good pair of running shoes is a must. One of the first lessons we learn is to buy new shoes after 300-500 miles. Once the foam wears out, the material loses its ability to absorb shock and the risk of overuse injuries increases. "When" to replace your shoes will depend on your body type, running mechanics, and gait.



A second important lesson is to rotate your shoes to accommodate different workouts.

Why, you wonder?

The thousands of steps we put on our shoes leads to a decline in its cushioning. Even though the bottom of the shoes may appear to have plenty of tread, the midsole material can still be broken down. Rotating shoes can increase their longevity by allowing the cushioning to "recover" which can take 24 to 48 hours. Having another pair gives your shoes a rest day, while supporting you on your next run.

Rotating the types of shoes used for different runs and workouts is beneficial in several ways:

- Training Muscles - Switching up your shoes will allow you to build strength in those smaller muscles of the lower legs that get challenged by a lighter shoe. Training in a lightweight/minimal shoe will engage more muscles than a fully cushioned or stability shoe. Heavier cushioned or stability shoes are great for shock absorption on long runs or when your legs feel fatigued from the day before.
- Injury Prevention - Running is *extremely repetitive*—an hour-long run will likely accumulate over ten thousand foot strikes; each impact very much like the previous one. Training in a range of shoes provides diversity in the same way that changing running surfaces does (road, trail, grass, treadmill). Or think of it like working out in the gym, doing different weight exercises that target the same body part, but in a slightly different way. Different shoes distribute running forces differently, thus lessening the strain on any given body part. By changing shoes or terrain, you vary the *repetitive* impact on your body, thereby reducing the risk of a *repetitive stress* injury. (See my use of the word "repetitive" here!)
- Eliminate Potential Muscle Imbalances – If you consistently run in the same pair of shoes, over time the shoe foam changes as it wears down, affecting your running form and muscles, not just your feet but all over. In time, you'll begin to compensate for those imbalances, which can lead to injury. Think about what can happen when you increase training intensity or mileage, and you're running in the same pair of shoes day after day. Avoid overloading any one muscle, bones, tendon, or ligament while simultaneously strengthening others, simply by changing your shoes.

To accommodate the various types of runners and workouts performed, shoe companies make a variety of different models, styles, and versions of shoes. Within a style line of shoes, you can find a cushioned trainer (tends to be heavier and durable), a lightweight shoe (which can be a racer), and a racing flat. For

example, I wear a New Balance Zante or HOKA Conquest for my easy and long runs. For tempo and intervals, I run in New Balance Zante Pursuit or Solas. For racing, I prefer New Balance Solas or Reebok RunFast. Each shoe has a different attribute that contributes to the purpose of the intended run.

Different shoes for different runs. Like a training plan, you have different workouts.

Type	Attributes	Purpose	Life	Notes
Cushioned	Soft midsoles, shock absorption	Long run support when form fatigues	300-600 mi	Usually heavier, more support
Lightweight or Minimal	Little cushion, more bounce, lighter, flexible, less structure	Faster paced runs-tempos, intervals; can be used as a racing flat	200-500 mi	Can be firm which allows foot to spring quickly through heel-toe transition
Racing Flat	Lightweight, very little cushion & support	Racing	100-300 mi	Requires time to adapt; stripped down build; aren't for everyone
Stability*	Midsole cushion, medial posting	Moderate support to prevent too much motion	300-500 mi	Helpful when returning from injury or support due to fatigued legs
Motion Control	Heavier, durable, rigid, stiffer/firm midsole	Controls severe foot overpronation; stops foot from rolling in	300-500 mi	
Trail	More aggressive tread; some shoes are waterproof	Specific to terrain	300-600 mi	

*Not to be confused with Motion Control shoes

In different models, even those within the same foot-function category - neutral, stability, motion control - you will strike the ground and run slightly differently. In doing so, you will be shifting the stresses on your body from model to model, which may help reduce your chance of injury.

I hate breaking in new shoes! By varying my shoe type for the type of run I'm doing, allows me to gradually introduce a new pair into my training cycle without too much disruption and risk of injury.

Take the next step in your training and experiment in your shoe collection. When making any change to your running shoes, it's best to make any change gradually, allowing your body to adapt. When experimenting with different styles, be aware that it is normal to have some increased soreness because you aren't accustomed yet. However, don't confuse pain with injury, unless those injury signs are present during your run even with your normal beloved shoes.

Remember to be brand impartial when shopping. Seek out your neighborhood running store for assistance in fit and guidance with a new shoe selection that works for you.

Happy Running!



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