



SHOES AND GEAR

Shoes, Shoes, Shoes



The most important piece of equipment you will need is a good pair of shoes for walking. A poor quality shoe will get you through the first few weeks, but eventually you will need a shoe that provides adequate cushioning to absorb the impact of your stride. Keep in mind that when you walk, your foot strikes the ground up to 1000 times per kilometer at 1.5 to 3 times the force that your body weight will impart with every step you take.

There are plenty of shoes on the market, and there is no ideal shoe that suits everyone. But the criteria outlined below should help you to find a pair that works for you:

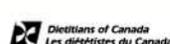
1. Be prepared to spend in the range of \$100- \$175. This should give you a good performance shoe.
2. Your greatest concern should be fit- not air, gel, pump or other heavily hyped features. Make absolutely certain the shoes fit, allowing some extra room in the toe box.
3. Have your feet measured, even if you think you know your shoe size. (You may have larger feet than you think.) Don't be concerned if you take a half size or larger than your "normal" street-shoe size. Remember too that your feet will swell a bit with the increased circulation when you walk, so it wouldn't hurt to have a little extra room in the toe box.
4. When you go to try on new shoes, remember to bring along any support inserts you plan to wear while walking. Wearing dress socks to try on runners will adversely affect the fit of the shoe and not provide you with a proper indication of fit.
5. Where possible, go to a specialty running store where knowledgeable sales people are available for guidance and assistance. They will help you to make the best shoe choice for you. Try to bring a pair of well-worn shoes so they can analyze your wear pattern. Don't be swayed by large chain store offering special offers or discount. Go with your instincts and what feels best on your feet. Walk around the store. Make sure you feel comfortable. When you go home, wear the new shoes around in the house for awhile before you walk outside in them, just to be sure. You shouldn't feel any discomfort at all. If you do, they are not the right shoe or you. Generally, the "having to break the shoes in" time period is nothing like it once was. The fit should be right, and the materials are so light and flexible that blistering should not occur.

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6. Shop for shoes later in the day, not first thing in the morning. Most feet will swell as the day progresses, so you want to avoid buying shoes that are too small.

Clothing

Over the past 10 years there have been significant improvements in exercise clothing. Today, most athletic clothing is primarily made from synthetic fibers. Technical exercise shirts, shorts, tights, and sport bras are made from multiple layers of nylons and polyester based materials. When you do start to make clothing purchases, here is what you'll need to know, starting from the feet up.

- **Socks:** Various synthetic fabrics work better than cotton. Most walkers prefer socks that are thin, lightweight, and ankle length. Technical socks are probably your least expensive item, but test whatever pair you purchase in a few walks before filling your drawers with dozens more.
- **Shorts:** Synthetics shorts with a slight side cut are popular with most runners, but most walkers prefer a more generous cut, length down to at least midway on the thighs. Most tech shorts come with built-in underpants. Some shorts are “unisex” for both men and women, but many women prefer purchasing shorts designed specifically for them.
- **Shirts:** A simple, cotton T-shirt will work, however, there are many new “wicking” materials that dry quickly and are comfortable for hot or rainy days. “Wicking” means the perspiration is moved from the skin to the outside of the garment because of the technical weave in the fabric.
- **Underwear for men:** Most walkers wear their normal underwear (briefs) beneath long-leg clothing or under their sport shorts.
- **Underwear for women:** A sport bra can be worn under a tech shirt or as an outer garment on warm days. Large-breasted women sometimes wear two sport bras for additional support. Most specialty running/walking stores are happy to order in special fitting bras if they don't have one in stock to meet your needs.
- **Tights:** In colder weather, nylon tights or a narrow-style fitness pant will keep you warm without limiting your ability to move quickly. The slimmer cuts are generally more comfortable and practical than floppy sweat pants. Lycra cycling shorts (or half-leg tights) are also popular, particularly if leg chafing is a problem.
- **Warm-ups:** If tech tights are not for you, another idea is to wear a light, breathable track suit over your shorts and t-shirt. In colder weather, layering is definitely the way to go. Avoid overdressing – if you feel a little chilly for the first five to ten minutes, then you know you will be comfortable after you've warmed up.



- **Hat:** A hat or toque (along with a pair of gloves) is essential when walking in the winter. A billed cap will keep the sun off your head in the summer (and don't forget the sunscreen). The best hats for warm weather walking have mesh tops to allow heat to escape.
- **Sports watch:** A sports watch that measures minutes and seconds would be useful for walkers to more easily and efficiently keep track of their time spent walking. A sports watch becomes particularly important when the program includes a variety of intervals.