

Walking - Wear the correct shoes and clothing

Physical Therapy in Thousand Oaks for Choosing Walking Equipment

Shoes

'Walking a mile in someone else's shoes' may give you a good feel for their situation, but it may also give you an injury! Everyone has their own specific needs when it comes to proper footwear for walking. These needs may depend on the unique anatomy of each individual's foot, or may be affected by previous injuries to the foot, lower extremity or even the low back. For this reason, it is advisable to head to a shop that specializes in exercise footwear and try on several pairs of walking shoes in order to decide on the right pair for you. In addition to the the advice below, the assistance of a knowledgeable store clerk can be invaluable. It is often easier to decide on a single pair if you try two different shoes on at the same time (one on each foot); this quickly makes it easy to compare the feel of the two different shoe types.



Although each person has their own individual needs in regards to shoes, there are a few common threads that you should consider when choosing a walking shoe. Running and walking are very different in their biomechanics and for this reason, the shoes made for these activities are different. If you are a serious walker, it is recommended that you purchase shoes specifically designed for walking, and consider getting an assessment of your gait at Bartley Physical Therapy to assess your walking pattern.

The first major difference between the biomechanics of walking and running is that the pattern of striking your feet to the ground is different between the two activities; walking uses a heel-toe pattern and running requires more of a mid to fore-foot landing. To accommodate this difference the two types of shoes are generally built up in different areas of the shoe. The second difference is that the overall impact one puts through their feet when running is obviously significantly higher than that which is put through the feet when walking. For this reason there is generally more cushioning built into the running shoe. Walking shoes still need some cushioning throughout the sole of the entire foot, but the heel in particular should not be specifically built up as it is with many running shoes as this will alter the way you strike your heel when walking. In addition, the heel of the shoe does not need to be wider than the shoe (beveled), as it often is in a running shoe; this too will negatively alter the mechanics of your foot strike.

Your walking shoe should provide some flexibility particularly in the forefoot of the shoe. As mentioned above, when walking, your heel should strike first, then your midfoot, and then you should push off with your toes. The shoe you wear needs to be flexible enough to bend in the forefoot as you push off. You can check this by holding the shoe in your hand and simulating a step with the shoe on the ground. Watch to see that the shoe can flex and that it does so in the forefoot. Many running shoes are designed to flex further back in the midfoot area in order to accommodate the unique mechanics of running, therefore they are not as appropriate to be used as a walking shoe. A shoe that has no flexibility in it will quickly cause wear on your foot and lead to discomfort even on short walks.

Lastly, it is recommended that you replace your shoes regularly to maximize the support they give you; any visible smoothing of the sole or wearing through of the toe end means it is time for a new pair. If you are keeping track of your walking distances, most experts would agree that your shoes should be replaced after approximately 350-500 miles or 500-800 km. Keep in mind that if your weight is on the higher end, your shoes will wear out quicker than someone who is lighter than you!

Socks

Alongside good shoes comes the need for good socks. Ensure the socks you wear are of a lightweight and breathable material and that they fit snugly. If you are prone to blistering then wearing two pairs of socks can help to reduce the friction on your skin, which creates the blister. The double pair of socks encourages the friction to occur between the two layers of material instead of between the sock and your skin. The first pair of socks should be made of a synthetic moisture wicking material and then the second layer can be made of either synthetic or cotton. If you do develop an area of potential blister soreness (a hotspot), it is crucial that you treat it straight away. Immediate treatment can avoid a blister developing and save walking long distances in pain.

Walking/Hiking Poles

Although not essential, walking/hiking poles are highly recommended when walking, particularly if you are walking frequently, walking long distances, engaging in hill walking, or have existing knee or ankle injuries. Walking with two poles is better than just using one.

Hiking poles reduce the strain on the body particularly when walking downhill. When walking uphill they also transfer some of your body weight and required effort to your upper limbs rather than loading the entire weight of your body on your lower extremities. In addition to taking some of the body load, hiking poles also increase your overall stability when walking and in this way help to decrease the incidence of falls. If you use the poles aggressively to plant and pull your body, the use of poles can increase the amount of calories you burn and provide a better workout to your upper body.

Hiking poles vary widely in their price and in their quality therefore the type of walking or hiking you will be doing will determine which poles would suit you best. Once again, the in-depth knowledge of a sporting expert at your local store is invaluable when choosing of walking poles for your individual situation. In general, choose a handgrip that is comfortable for your hand and one in which you can relax your hand and your grip while your wrist is in its natural resting position. The retention strap on the pole should be lax enough for you to slip your hand out easily if needed but short enough that your hand does not slip out upon movement. Poles used just for fitness walking do not need to be adjustable in their length as you are not enduring the extreme up and down terrain such as that of a trek. Non-adjustable poles are generally lighter and of course have no chance of collapsing if the adjuster isn't tightened properly. If you plan on walking on several surfaces choose walking poles that have removable tips which can be replaced with baskets for

walking on soft ground, or special rubber tips for walking on asphalt (paws).

Clothing



The clothing you choose for walking will depend on both your personal preference as well as the climate/environment you are walking in. As a general rule, you should choose clothing that allows your sweat to be wicked away from your body both to keep you cool or keep you warm, depending on the weather situation. This means choosing a synthetic layer for the clothing that is closest to your skin, rather than cotton, particularly if you are layering for warmth.

Pedometer

A pedometer is simply a device to measure how many steps you have taken. Pedometers are not necessary to get into walking as a fitness activity, but they are certainly handy and useful if you do have one. Pedometers are recommended if you plan to be a serious walker. Pedometers measure your body motion in order to get a reading for the number of steps you have taken. Various types are available and may be attached to your hip, worn on a lanyard, worn on your wrist or your shoe, or kept in your pocket. Pedometers vary in price according to their design as well as added features. The most important feature of a pedometer is that it is accurate in counting your steps; unfortunately it has been shown that pedometers are less accurate at slower speeds (less than approximately 3mph / 4.8kmph) which is right around an average walking speed, therefore investing in a good pedometer with technology that improves accuracy is worth it for a serious walker. More accurate pedometers use an advanced system (an accelerometer, which is a small chip) to detect overall body movements. These pedometers do not rely on the tilt of or the position of the pedometer which is the case in the traditional pedometers that are worn on the hip in order to detect hip flexion. Be sure to inform the store clerk that you will be using the pedometer for walking rather than running so they can assist you in choosing a pedometer within your price range that is as accurate as possible.

Some pedometers can also measure the distance that you have walked; to do this they require that you input your average stride length. Other added features may include fat estimators, countdown timers, calorie counters, and melody pacers. The accuracy of any of the added features will need to be explored and the true necessity of the added features for your individual situation should also be questioned. Acquiring a pedometer that accurately calculates the steps you take is by far the most important feature required and therefore this should be your top priority when purchasing one.

Orthotics

If your feet, knees, hips or low back are hurting despite choosing appropriate equipment and having an efficient gait, it may be worthwhile trying orthotics. These inserts help to align your feet more optimally and allow you to walk with efficient biomechanics. There are a range of orthotics available on the market, from over-the-counter arch supports to custom made carbon-fibre inserts, that can fit most shoe types. If you are unsure if orthotics are right for you, speak to your Physical Therapist at Bartley Physical Therapy or visit your local chiropodist, pedorthist, or orthotist for an assessment.

Click on a link below to learn more:

- [Be Sure to Stretch](#)
- [Enjoy but don't strain or sprain](#)