

THE ULTIMATE SHOE FITTING AND LACING GUIDE

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Remember visiting the neighborhood shoe store when you were a kid? Mom smiled proudly, easing your fears as the salesman measured your little feet with a brannock device, then pinched the toes of each of the three or four pair you tried on for the best fit. Remember your most recent trip to the shoe store? It probably wasn't quite as memorable an experience.

No wonder 80% of Americans endure regular foot pain. Most people don't know the first thing about finding a properly fitted shoe--and many shoe stores don't offer very much help. If you've been experiencing "The Agony of Da Feet," follow these 5 easy steps before buying a new pair of walking shoes:

- 1.) Look for "The 3 Bs"--blisters, bunions and black toenails. According to podiatrist Howard Palamarchuck, if your old shoes don't fit properly you're likely to develop some of these painfully obvious signs. Before buying a new pair, identify problem areas where shoes slip or bind, leading to irritation.
- 2.) Have your feet measured. Dr. Palamarchuck believes it's important that feet be measured at least once per year since they tend to elongate and spread with age, and may also change size after foot surgery, pregnancy and child bearing. Palamarchuck also notes that most people have one foot that's 1/2 to 1 size larger than the other, and recommends that shoes be bought to fit the larger foot. The Athlete's Foot chain has led a resurgence in personal attention by staffing each store with "Certified Fit Technicians" who are specially trained to select a shoe to conform to your unique foot size and shape, activity level and comfort needs. Other chains are following their lead, so find a store that will take the time to measure your feet.
- 3.) Know your foot type. Knowing your shoe size and width gives a good two-dimensional picture of your foot. But your foot is a three-dimensional object. According to Tom Brunick, director of the Athlete's Foot Wear-Test Center, you can learn a lot about your feet from a simple "wet test." Step into some water and then stand on a surface to leave an imprint of your bare foot. The imprint will tell you if you have a flat, normal or a high-arched foot. Make sure you select a shoe built to conform to your particular foot-type.
- 4.) Try on several brands and sizes. Veteran shoe designer Ian Whatley notes that there are no industry-wide sizing standards, so measured size doesn't guarantee your foot will fit a particular shoe. Whatley also noted that shoes can vary up to 1 1/2 sizes even within brands, depending on shoe materials, construction methods and manufacturing conditions. Try on several brands and sizes to account for these differences. If a salesperson complains about making several trips to the stockroom, take your business elsewhere.
- 5.) Go for a spin. According to Whatley, your fit in the shoe store is a "static fit," but you need to know about "dynamic fit." Before you buy, give your shoes a good test walk under "normal" walking conditions. Whatley has several recommendations: Your feet tend to swell when warmed up, so make sure to take a good walk before shopping; wear your usual socks, since a thick sock can add 1/2 size to

the length and 2 sizes to your width; don't just walk on the store's carpeted floor--get out and walk on a hard surface; and walk both slowly and quickly, and around turns to see how the shoe interacts with your feet under these conditions.

Get to know your feet and what to look for in a shoe. Although you might not find a pair of Buster Brown's in size 11-EEE, your feet will be so happy you may still walk out of the store feeling like a kid again.

Foot size and type will largely determine how well your shoes fit, but not entirely. According to Tom Brunick, director of the Athlete's Foot Wear Test Center, many fit problems can be solved by adjusting the lacing system of the shoes. The following are examples of lacing techniques designed to accommodate various fitting needs:



[*Return to homepage](#)
