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Shoes & Sports

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The first thing most athletes do after signing up for a sport is to shop for shoes for the specific sport. A comfortable, effective shoe can be a great addition to sport performance. Conversely, a poorly fitted, uncomfortable shoe can be a significant impediment to performance. With this in mind, shoes should fit well and be comfortable the first time you wear them. A good shoe should not require a “breaking in” period.

When shopping for shoes some basic principles should be observed:

Tie shoes are better than slip-ons

A laced shoe should have at least five eyelets per side

The sole should be rigid. The stiffer the sole, the more force dissipated in the shoe away from the foot. The exception to this is wrestling which requires a flexible sole.

The heel counter or back of the shoe should be supportive and rigid. In order to have arch control, the shoe first needs to control the heel.

The shoe should be comfortable. The shoe should be conforming to the foot and not the other way around.

A few tips on buying shoes:

- Have both feet measured as no two feet are identical. Variance may be as much as one half size.
- Feet should be measured when standing as the foot deforms differently when standing.
- Feet get bigger over time even in adults, so measure your feet regularly.
- The heel should not slip out of the shoe.
- Buy shoes later in the day as feet have a tendency to swell during the day.

General comments on shoe wear:

Rotate shoes, it is best to have two pairs of shoes for a particular sport. The material may not dry in one day and the materials may not recover every day. By rotating shoes the materials have adequate time to dry and recover between uses.

Wear sport specific shoes. For example- court shoes are specifically designed for solid surfaces and are not designed for wear on uneven surfaces.

High top shoes have not been shown to provide any more support than low tops. If ankle weakness is a concern buying a shoe that accommodates taping or bracing is a better choice.

Orthotics and shoes:

Orthotics are insoles that are specifically fabricated for the athlete. They are made by taking a cast impression of the foot and then molding an insole that can be placed in the shoe. When an athlete wears an orthotic, the existing insole may need to be removed to accommodate the custom orthotic. With this in mind, shoes that are bought for sport should have a removable insole to accommodate the orthotic. Better still, the orthotics should be brought with the athlete when evaluating foot gear for purchase.

Lots of great information on appropriate shoe gear is available at The American Podiatric Medical Association and The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons. Additional information may also be obtained by contacting R. D. Lee Evans, DPM at Des Moines Orthopedic Surgeons, 224-5224.