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WEATHER

Correct footwear can help fend off pain, injuries

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Deirdre Cox Baker | Posted: Friday, April 30, 2010 2:00 am | Loading...

If the shoe fits, as the old saying goes, wear it. But just how important that fit has become may surprise some people, especially those who exercise regularly.

"Thirty years ago, you'd just buy a shoe because you liked the color," said Doug Foster, co-owner of the Running Wild running, walking and fitness store in Davenport. "It is quite involved anymore."

Consider fitness expert Tracey Lopez, who has 30 pairs of shoes for her various athletic activities.

"I do lots of sports," said Lopez, fitness coordinator at the Bettendorf Life Fitness Center. She plays professional disc golf and has four types of shoes for that sport, including a Gore-Tex version for rainy conditions and lightweight models on hot summer days.

Correctly fitted shoes benefit the entire body, according to Dr. Jessica Ellis, a sports medicine specialist at ORA Orthopedics in Bettendorf. The doctor noted, however, that there is no evidence showing one certain brand of shoe is better than another.

Court vs. running shoes

Ellis puts shoes in two categories: Court shoes, for sports such as tennis and volleyball in which a participant needs to move sideways quickly; and running shoes, which are designed for heel-to-toe motion control.

A hybrid design between the two is called a cross-training shoe. "That cross-training shoe works for most activities," Ellis said. "You could use this shoe to play basketball one day and run two miles the next."

A pair of shoes can be purchased for the orthopedic benefits, such as the styles offered at Running Wild, which specializes in running and walking shoes.

Or, as Ellis said, special orthotic devices can be used to solve foot problems. A frequent issue she identified is calluses on the pad of the foot: A cushion placed right behind that callus should alleviate pain.

Further, aging baby boomers will notice the natural cushion on their feet start to thin out. Bones get more pressure on them and cause pain, Ellis explained. Custom orthotics can help in such circumstances.

Foster stocks shoe brands in widths all the way from AA to EEEEEEE (narrow to very wide), and the staff at Running Wild measures the foot and evaluates the arch. "Half the people who come in here just want to be fitted correctly," he said, adding that the store also works in conjunction with area doctors and chiropractors who suggest specific needs for a patient.



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Lopez endorses a specialty store for most purposes. "They can spend the time on analysis and really steer you in the right direction," she said.

Performance first

Ellis has been with ORA Orthopedics for four years and also spent a year as a sports medicine specialist at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind. She ties many shoe choices to performance, which she identified as a big part of the purchasing process.

Different styles are made for the various conditions in which they are used, such as cleated shoes for field sports. For example, soccer shoes have little cushioning, Ellis said, because the athletes like to feel the ball on their foot.

How a shoe is tied may help support the top of the foot, the doctor said. Just how a certain style should be tied can be explained by the salesperson.

Correctly fitted shoes are important to exercising in relative safety and comfort. "Feet feel painful or injuries may result if you use the wrong shoes," Ellis said.

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