



Tennis Shoes Fact Sheet

Tennis is all about balance. You have to maintain good balance when you swing. You have to strike a balance between power and control on your shots. Few people, however, think enough about the balance that has to exist between their feet and their shoes.

The truth is, it's critical that your footwear be properly matched to the anatomy of your feet and the surface you play on. Ill-fitting shoes can lead to blisters, ankle and knee pain, and loss of movement on the court. But when your shoes and feet are in sync, you'll feel good and play your best tennis.

What's Your Foot Type?

The first step in finding the right shoe is to figure out what type of foot you have. There are three basic foot types. While only a podiatrist can give you a fully accurate analysis of your foot type, you can evaluate yourself at home too.

The next time you step out of the shower, take a close look at the footprints your wet feet leave on the floor. If you see a crescent-shaped footprint with little or no impression made by your arch, you have a supinated foot. Supinators tend to wear out the outside part of the bottom of their shoes (the lateral side) before the medial (big toe) side. Supinators also tend to have wide feet and need to look for a shoe that provides extra room in the forefoot and toe box. They also need a shoe with extra cushioning to compensate for their high arches.

If your foot leaves a wet mark on the floor that's completely filled in, arch and all, you have a pronated foot. Pronators often have flat feet, and the medial portion of their shoe bottom wears down before the lateral part. People with this foot type often need extra support from their shoes so a mid-cut model or a shoe with extra stability on the medial side is usually a wise choice.

If you're one of the few people who leave a wet footprint with a moderate amount of arch, you have a neutral foot. Consider yourself lucky-this is the most efficient and biomechanically versatile foot type. Players with neutral feet can play tennis in almost any shoe.

Understand the Design

You know your foot type. Next up is understanding the shoe's design so you can pick the one that will perform best for you. There are four parts of a shoe you need to consider:

Upper: The top portion of the shoe, or the upper, is usually made of leather, synthetic leather, or a combination of materials. If you need extra support, look for lacing systems that thread into reinforcements going down the sides of the shoe; they'll provide added stability. When you try a shoe on, be sure the upper is comfortable against the top of your foot and is not too tight. If you drag your toe when you serve, look for a durable toecap. And if you hit your forehand from an open stance (that is, with most of the front of your body facing the net), you'll benefit from additional material along the medial portion of the upper since that area often slides along the court and wears down faster as you play.

Insole: This is the portion of the shoe that your foot rests on, and it's the least technical part of the operation. If you've had foot problems and wear orthotics, check to see if the insole is removable. In most cases it will be, allowing you to replace a worn-out insole with an over-the-counter one that provides extra cushioning.

Midsole: The midsole is the section that lies between the shoe bottom and the insole. It's generally made from ethyl vinyl acetate (EVA) foam or polyurethane (PU) and in many cases is supplemented by air or gel inserts. The midsole supplies a shoe's cushioning.

It can often be tough to tell when the midsole breaks down and ceases to perform, but as a rule of thumb, a two- or three-day-a-week player will wear out a midsole in five to six months. Frequent players and people who are extremely aggressive on the court will go through midsoles more quickly due to the pounding they give their shoes.

If your shoes don't feel as cushioned as they did when they were new, the midsole may be shot. You should consider buying a new pair.



Outsole: This is where the rubber meets the road. The outsole's design affects the traction you'll get on hard and clay courts. Herringbone designs that form a tight, wave-like pattern perform best on clay, while outsoles with the most variation in the design (a little herringbone here, a wider groove there) give you the best traction on hard courts.

An outsole should also be durable enough to stand up to your style of game. If you play often or wear out shoes quickly, look for heavy-duty outsoles and try to get a pair with an outsole warranty; if they don't last, you can send them back to the manufacturer to get them replaced.

Heavy or Light?

How heavy should a pair of tennis shoes be? Well, light is nice, but heavy has its advantages, the lighter your shoes, the faster you can zip around the court. So why are tennis shoes almost always heavier than running shoes? The stop-and-start demands of tennis require that shoes have ample cushioning, extra support, and more durable outsoles, all of which add weight. In an effort to lighten up their shoes, manufacturers often use an hourglass-shaped outsole design for some models. But this may move the shoe's flex point toward the middle of the shoe, near your arch, rather than at the ball of the foot, where your foot naturally bends. Only you can decide how much weight you're willing to live with in the name of increased stability and durability. Consider owning two pairs of tennis shoes: a lighter game-day shoe and a heavier training shoe (this technique has been used by distance runners for years). If you practice in a heavier shoe and play your matches in a lighter shoe, you'll feel quicker in competition and you'll go through your shoes more slowly while you're at it.

The Bottom Line: When you get beyond fashion and examine the function of footwear, you'll wind up performing better on the court. What more could you ask of a tennis shoe?

4 STEPS TO A PERFECT FIT

Buying a pair of shoes should be an educated endeavour, not something that you leave to the luck of the draw. When purchasing tennis shoes, keep the following things in mind:

- Buy shoes after you've played tennis or late in the afternoon (feet typically swell 5 to 10 percent after exercise or by the end of the day). And be sure to bring the same kind of socks you wear to a match so that you can accurately gauge what size shoe you need.
- If the salesperson or shopkeeper doesn't measure each part of your feet, he or she isn't fitting your shoes properly. Be sure that the length and width of each foot are measured before you buy anything. It's not uncommon for people to have one foot that's larger than the other. If that's the case, buy a pair of shoes to fit the larger foot.
- Bring your old shoes. The wear on your used pair will help a smart fitter determine how much support, cushioning, and durability you need. The salesperson may also ask you what shoes you've worn comfortably in the past.
- Based on your foot type, support needs, and style preferences, your fitter should be able to recommend at least two or three different pairs of shoes to try.