



Are Your Running Shoes Worn Out?

Written by Greg Uchacz and Amy Barnett
Five things you should know.

It seems that most of us have some vague understanding of when we need to replace our old running shoes. We usually base it on the outward look of the shoe. When our big toe starts to push through the top, we figure that's a dead giveaway. Sometimes, when we have a big race coming up and want to make sure we get 'geared up' for the big day, we buy new shoes.

But what do we really know about the proper life of a running shoe? When really is the right time to replace those old sneakers? We've all heard the stats—'after X number of miles' or 'once or twice a year'—but there are many ways to determine if the running shoe needs to be replaced or if it still exhibits the integrity needed to ensure you are getting all you need from your equipment. Here are five quick things to look out for:

1. Industry standards for when a shoe should be replaced are generally 300 miles (~ 500 kilometres) or six months; whichever comes first. Certainly the mileage standard is understandable; with enough wear the shoe simply breaks down. But why six months? A new running shoe left in the closet for a period of time still breaks down! This is because the chemical properties in the shoe deteriorate over time and the shoe simply loses its inherent properties.
2. Here are a couple of nifty ways to assess the wear of your running shoe. First, while holding the shoe, push upward with your thumb on the sole of the shoe around the area where the ball of the foot sits. Slip your other hand into the shoe and try to feel your thumb pushing through the bottom with the tips of your fingers. If you can feel your thumb through the shoe, it's time for a change. Next, the mid-sole is the material that makes up the dense foamy component above the out-sole, or bottom of your shoe. The shoe is considered 'compromised' if the mid-sole material has become distinctly softer or 'crinkles' when squeezed between your fingers.
3. Take a look at the bottom of the shoe. When the out-sole (or rubbery bottom of the shoe) is worn down to the midsole (foam), it's time for a trip to the store for a new pair.
4. The heel counter is the back of the shoe that supports your heel. Take a look. Does the heel stand up straight or lean to the inside or outside? A 'lean' means that the shoe has lost its ability to support the heel and may ultimately lead to aches and pains or even a full-blown injury.

5. For those of us that call ourselves regular runners, we are well aware that training is not devoid of the usual aches and pains that go hand in hand with increased training volume or intensity. However, if aches, pains, and soreness start to creep into your training program when no change in training volume or intensity have occurred, the first step is to look at the age and status of your shoes. The equipment demands for the sport of running are not great, but they are crucial to injury prevention and performance.

Certainly the exact time to replace your running shoe is based on many more factors than what is described above. Such factors as body weight, training surfaces, weather conditions, running mechanics, and comfort level need to be considered. But the five points listed above should serve as a much more reliable guideline than 'once or twice a year.'

About the Authors

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