How To Choose The Right Gym Shoes

I'm always looking at how I can gain that 1% edge. Whether it's taking my own pillow when I travel so I can sleep deeply on the plane or tracking down the most functional workout gear to get the most out of my training session, I'm always looking at how I can create optimal conditions for the best results. While the truth is that you don't need fancy gym shoes to train, the reality is that uncomfortable or unsupportive footwear may lead to blisters, wobbles and even injuries if you don't have the right foundation on your feet.

When it comes to choosing gym shoes, don't just focus on the style or colors. Think of their function. Do you need them for weight lifting, the Stairmaster or outdoor cardio? Think of their fit. Do you need to be mindful of fit because you have broad feet or bunions? Do you need to think about support as you have an ankle or knee injury? Opting for quality sneakers that cater to your specific needs is essential rather than settling for any pair you find on the shelves. Below are my best tips for what to look for in gym shoes, as well as my and the coaching team's own gym shoe recommendations. Whether you choose one of our favorites or use our tips to find a shoe of your own, do your research and find one that gives you the best bang for your buck while meeting your training needs.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN GYM SHOES

STABILITY - A strong lifting stance begins with a stable foundation. Without proper footwork, you risk instability when lifting heavy objects. Choosing gym shoes with a flat outsole and a moderate heel-to-toe drop can be a good idea. While running shoes can have a slanted sole to propel users forward, dedicated weight-lifting shoes prioritize grounding. Minimizing the height difference between the heel and toe box helps keep you firmly connected to the floor or machine during workouts.

FIT - When selecting the right gym shoes, prioritize a snug and secure fit that isn't overly tight. Your footwear should provide stability and support during different exercises and lifts. Excess room in the midfoot or toe box could lead to incorrect stances and setups.

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While some toe flexibility might be advantageous for static lifts such as squats and deadlifts, a snugger fit is generally preferable for most activities.

DURABILITY - Your dedication in the gym can result in wear and tear on your gear. To extend the lifespan of your footwear between sessions, opt for sneakers with durable upper materials and resilient foams. Look for tightly woven mesh, ripstop fabrics, and other sturdy materials that can withstand the demands of training. If you perform a lot of outdoor cardio, look for waterproof and wipe-clean fabrics.

BREATHABILITY - Whether it's beasting it on the gym floor or strutting your stuff on the treadmill, you're bound to sweat and create a bit of a whiff, so you need footwear that effectively manages perspiration. Seek out shoes with a mesh pattern on the upper, as this material facilitates airflow, keeping feet cool and dry. However, it's worth noting that highly breathable shoes may experience durability issues over time.

GRIP - Prioritize gym shoes with a durable and grippy outsole designed to provide ample traction on gym surfaces. Choose lug patterns that suit your environment; for outdoor workouts, opt for a more aggressive tread. Ultimately, aim for underfoot grip that offers stability and security to prevent slips or loss of footing.

GYM SHOE RECOMMENDATIONS

BEST FOR BOTH GYM AND CARDIO USE

REEBOK Nanos and NIKE Metcons

PROS: We have a joint tie in my choice for gym shoes: Reebok Nanos and Nike Metcons. I have worn them for years and don't have a favorite between the two. Both create a stable foundation with the flat sole and support around the heel, which gives me a confidence boost when I'm performing squats, as I have a weakness in my back, which can make me feel quite nervous. I find that I can wear either shoe in the gym and for cardio, making them a cost-effective investment in my eyes.

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CONS: My broad-footed friends have told me that both brands were a bit too narrow for them, but try them on and make your own mind up.

CLICK HERE for the Reebook Store.
CLICK HERE for the Nike Store.

BEST FOR BROAD FEET

VivoBarefoot

PROS: Head Trainer Laura has struggled with bunions on both feet since she was a teenager and is constantly searching for wide but stylish footwear. She wears VivoBarefoot Primus for weight lifting and loves how the wide shoe shape helps her find stability in exercises such as lunges, which her bunions make extra shaky for her to perform.

CONS: The Primus have flat and thin soles, which means that you can feel every pebble or bump in the pavement if you wear them for everyday activities. However, VivoBarefoot does make walking shoes, which are more functional for being out and about.

CLICK HERE for the VivoBarefoot Store.

BEST FOR ANKLE SUPPORT

Otomix

PROS: Coach Mark Getty has been a bodybuilder for over twenty years, which means he knows a thing or two about training. His footwear of choice is the weightlifting shoe brand, Otomix. This brand has been creating bodybuilder shoes since the 80s, and the lightweight style, full toe box, and high ankle support make it an excellent choice for maximum stability to push maximum load.

CONS: This shoe's design is very weightlifting-specific, which means you would need a separate sneaker for your cardio.

CLICK HERE for the Otomix Store.

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BEST FOR CARDIO

Hoka

PROS: Hoka is a highly recommended brand among our cardio-loving team members. They are available in regular and wide fits, providing excellent stability and comfort in their well-cushioned sole. They also come in lots of funky colors and are even endorsed by The Royal College of Podiatry (RCPod), which recognises products that have been found to be beneficial to foot health. If these are out of your budget, simply look for a lightweight running shoe with good ankle support.

CONS: For outdoor cardio, the fabric on these trainers can get stained quite easily. If you like sparkling sneakers, they may need to be cleaned in the washer often. But they do wash well!

CLICK HERE for the Hoka Store.

BEST BUDGET WEIGHTLIFTING SHOES

Converse

PROS: If you want a shoe for under $100 that you can wear for more than just the gym, Converse are a great option. With their flat sole and lace-up ankle support, you can break new PRs on your squat one minute and stroll around the supermarket in them the next.

CONS: Converse are made for fashion wear, not gym wear, so be careful not to drop any weights on your toes, as they aren't designed to offer any protection.

CLICK HERE for the Converse Store.