

November 2016 | mapmyrun.com | Sarah Wassner Flynn | Fitness

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When Should You Replace Your Running or Walking Shoes?

Sure, your running or walking shoes feel super comfy. There may be plenty of tread left on the bottoms. And those day-glo green features may still be shining bright. But looks (and feel) can be deceiving: The more wear-and-tear on the shoe, the faster its sole and shock absorbers break down, leaving you with a less-than-supportive sneaker that can cause injury. So when should you replace those athletic shoes? Here are some guidelines:



One Shoe Does Not Fit All

There's no hard and fast rule that applies to all shoes—and all runners and walkers. In fact, experts say that a shoe's lifespan depends on variables like the type of shoe, your gait, your weight, and where you run or walk. Shoes used mostly on harder surfaces, for example, are going to be worn down more rapidly than if you were to wear those shoes only during workouts on a bouncy track. Same for if you "pound" the ground when you run as opposed to having a softer stride.

Most pros agree that shoes should be replaced between 300–500 miles of use. After that, they lose maximum support and shock absorption, which may leave you vulnerable to injury. Still, the exact timing is up to how you use them.

Although most shoe manufacturers will design their shoes to withstand 300–500 miles of wear and tear, athletic shoes are also designed for a specific activity, such as cross-training or running. But even a running shoe intended for pavement pounding may not last as long as a more durable trail running shoe that's designed to withstand the rocks, sticks, gravel and otherwise rugged terrain that comes with off road territory.

Walkers should be just as vigilant of a shoe's breakdown. While there's less shock on your body with walking, there tends to be more pounding since you take more steps than runners do over the same distance. Walkers also tend to land a bit more on their heels, so there may be more wear and tear in that area. A good plan to follow for walkers? Shoot to replace your shoes every three to five months if you walk 45 minutes at least three times a week.

Breaking Down the Break Down

So what signs should you look for when determining the state of your shoe? There are the obvious markers, the most telltale being a wrinkly or compressed midsole foam on the outside of your shoe. Technically known as ethylene vinyl acetate, or E.V.A., the foam is critical to the shoe's cushioning and, once compressed or squished, can invite injury with every step you take.

Other red flags: New aches or pains or sore feet during or after exercise, which may be your body's reaction to the lack of cushion and support of the midsole, and any obvious signs of overuse, like worn-down tread.

Be Smart About Your Shoes

Here are three ways to be sure your running and walking shoes don't run you into the ground:

1. Keep track of your mileage.

To know how much mileage you're covering in a specific pair of shoes, write the date when you first hit the roads in permanent marker on the sole. Fitness trackers like MapMyRun let you select the shoes you wear for every workout—a quick and simple way to log the mileage.

2. Take the shoe flexibility test.

Here's a way to test the cushioning of your shoes: Hold the shoe, laces up, and bend the toe back towards the heel. If the shoe folds easily, it's time to replace them!

3. Switch your shoes out.

Wearing different shoes for different activities (think: track shoes, road shoes, trail shoes, walking shoes) will increase the longevity of each pair and make sure you're getting the maximum support and cushion you need every time you work out.