FOOTNOTES ON RUNNING

Your feet carry the energy produced by your legs to carry the body forward. Incorrect foot alignment can transfer biomechanical abnormalities onto your ankles, knees, hips and back. As a runner your running shoes are the most important piece of equipment – incorrect shoes can cause various running problems.

SHOEWEAR

Running shoes can be divided into four categories. Stability shoes, Motion control shoes, Neutral or cushioned shoes and lightweight training shoes. Most runners use a neutral / cushioned shoe. When choosing a running shoe it is important to consult with a podiatrist or running shoe expert at your running shop. Different shoes suit different people

The most important compartment of a running shoe is the midsole. The midsole acts as a shock absorber and cushioning. Most running shoe technology goes into the midsole area. The outersole is purely the component that makes contact with the ground. The outersole can be very helpful in determining a runner's type of gait. Certain running problems can be picked up through the wear on the outersole.

WHAT IS THE CORRECT RUNNING SHOE

The correct shoe fits comfortably. The choice and brand of shoe is up to each individual.
Different feet have different needs.
It is best to try on various brands of shoes and decide on the most comfortable fit. There needs to be a thumb width between the tip of your longest toe and the tip of the innersole of the shoe when standing.
When choosing shoes make sure to try them on with your running socks.
It is best to try shoes towards the end of the day when your feet have reached their maximum size.

HOW TO CARE FOR YOUR SHOES

Wear your running shoes for running only.
Store shoes in a cool dry place ensuring that the innersoles dry properly as well.
Do not dry shoes in direct sunlight, the tumble dryer or with a hair dryer as these methods damage the midsole and other materials used in the shoe.
When cleaning your shoes do not immerse in water or place in the washing machine. The correct way to clean shoes is to stuff the shoe with newspaper or a towel and wash the upper of the shoe, wipe the midsole and wash the outersole with a brush.

WHEN ARE SHOES WORN OUT?

Examine your shoes carefully. The inside usually wears before the outside. Push your finger into the midsole, if it feels compressed or brittle it is worn out.
Listen to your feet, they usually let you know if your shoes are no good and not giving the support they were meant to, especially when they play up with various aches and pains.
Place your shoes on a flat surface to check if they are collapsing to the one side.

It is very difficult to determine exact mileage a shoe should last. It all depends on the intensity of training, weight of the runner etc.

LACING

There are various lacing techniques to ensure maximum comfort.
Incorrect lacing or tying laces too tight or loose can cause various problems including extensor tendonitis, burning sensation or numbness in feet, blistering etc.
Consult with a podiatrist, sports physician or running shoe shop specialist on various lacing techniques.

SOCKS

Limited time and effort is often spent when choosing your socks. Socks should provide a snug fit, keep the feet relatively dry and prevent blisters.
Preferably choose a sock comprising a blend of different materials. Blended material socks usually allow for maximum sweat absorption, reduce friction, allows for maximum comfort and support, and does not irritate the skin.
Running socks should be seamless and have an anatomical cushioning design.
It is best to buy socks that are specifically designed for left and right feet.
Make sure that the sock fits your foot and is not too tight or too loose,

ORTHOTICS AND RUNNING INNERSOLES

Biomechanical problems that are linked to the feet are often corrected with a running innersole modification or a custom made orthosis.
Orthotics are custom-made moulds of your feet. They are usually prescribed and fitted by a podiatrist after a thorough biomechanical examination.
When fitting orthotics great care needs to be taken. Orthotics that are not fitted correctly or worn in often cause a great deal of pain and discomfort. Always consult with your podiatrist if you are not comfortable with your orthotics. Do not hide them in the cupboard – when fitted properly they do wonders.

BLISTERS

Blisters occur in areas that are exposed to repetitive friction that cause the skin layers to separate and body fluids to infiltrate the area in an endeavor to protect it. A blood blister occurs when friction ruptures a blood vessel.

Common causes of blistering:

- Incorrect shoes
- Wearing shoes that are too small
- Incorrect socks and sock seams
- Abnormal biomechanics especially overpronation
- Dry feet – dry skin blisters easily
- Sweaty feet – Excessive sweating weakens the skin and makes it prone to blistering.
- Incorrect fitting innersoles or orthotics.

How to prevent blisters

- Moisturizing your feet should form a part of your daily routine
- Ensure that you wear the correct shoe that fits properly, if necessary consult a specialist - for help.
- Wear seamless running socks
- Some runners double up on their socks which causes friction to occur between the socks.
- Lubricate your feet well with Vaseline, then wear a pair of stockings cut off at the ankle, then your normal running socks over that, doing this reduces the friction considerably.
- Correct faulty foot biomechanics by consulting your podiatrist.
- Have your orthotics or innersoles adjusted by the person who prescribed them, they are meant to be very comfortable at all times.
- For sweaty feet use an absorbent foot powder or foot spray.

How to treat a Blister

1. Soak your feet in Epsom Salts
2. Lance painful and big blisters with a sterile new needle. Squeeze out the fluid taking care not to remove the top of the blister as this skin helps to keep the damaged area sterile.
3. Apply Methiolate or Mecurichrome to the blistered area, this will disinfect the area and toughen up the skin as well as drying out the blister.

Black toenails or blisters under the toenails.

Most Comrades runners tend to loose a toenail or have a black toenail at sometime during their training for Comrades. Excessive friction and pressure is generally the cause for this condition. Other common causes are:

- Ill-fitting shoes and socks
- Abnormal biomechanics
- Downhill running.

Treatment

It is best to consult with a podiatrist if “black toenails “ occur, especially if it is painful. The blister will be treated and advice given on how to prevent the condition re-occurring.

A PODIATRIST IS A HEALTH PROFESSIONAL WHO ASSESSES, DIAGNOSES AND TREATS FOOT AND LOWER LIMB CONDITIONS