

Take good care of them. Don't store shoes in cold areas (like an unheated garage or porch) during the winter or in direct sunlight during the summer. And don't wear running shoes for other sports such as tennis, soccer or basketball. After running in wet weather, be sure to dry your running shoes (including the insoles) thoroughly by placing them near a heat source. But don't dry them in a dryer.

Q: Will my shoes last longer if I alternate two pairs?

A: Not really. Running shoes aren't like your body; they don't need rest days. Shoes are made of foam and rubber, and daily use doesn't significantly affect their durability. Two exceptions: if you run twice a day, or if you get your shoes wet frequently, then alternating them might be a good idea to let each pair dry out better.

Q: I got more than 500 miles out of one pair of shoes but only 375 out of another. What gives?

A: Different shoes are made from different materials. Some running shoes are more durable than others because they are made of more durable materials.

The two most important components of any shoe are the midsole and outsole. Midsoles are made from either ethyl vinyl acetate (EVA) or polyurethane. EVA is used in most running shoes because it's lighter and has a more cushioned feel than polyurethane. But polyurethane is denser and more durable than EVA. Different companies embed a variety of air bags, gels, plastic devices and viscous solution in their midsoles; these can also affect midsole durability because they replace midsole foam.

Outsoles are made from either blown rubber or carbon rubber. Blown rubber is lighter, more cushiony and less durable than carbon rubber. Several shoes use blown rubber in the forefoot (for added cushioning) and carbon rubber in the high-wear areas of the heel (for better durability).

The most durable shoe has a polyurethane midsole and a carbon-rubber outsole. But don't expect this shoe to deliver maximum cushioning and lightness.

If you have any questions about the materials a shoe is made of, ask the salesperson or ask to see product information on that shoe.

Q: Is the shoe's weight a factor in durability?

A: Definitely. Generally, a very light shoe (less than 10 1/2 ounces) is less durable than a heavier shoe. That's one reason racing shoes are not nearly as durable as training shoes.

Q: Are there other factors to consider?

A: All the other factors are related to your individual running attributes and habits. If you're a big runner who trains primarily on roads, your shoe's midsoles and outsoles won't last as long as those of a light runner using the same shoe who trains primarily on grass and soft trails. Similarly, the more you overpronate (your feet roll too far inward upon impact), the more stress you put on the midsole and upper, and the

quicker the shoes will break down.

Q: How do I know when my shoes are worn out and should be replaced?

A: For the reasons mentioned above, it's difficult to give an exact mileage guide. But here are some things you can do: (1) stick your finger into the midsole to see if it feels brittle or compressed; (2) place your shoes on a table and check them for imbalances, such as worn areas or tilting to one side or the other; (3) listen to your aches and pains--they often mean it's time for a new pair of shoes.

Finally, it's important to understand that midsoles usually deteriorate before outsoles. In other words, don't stick with a pair of shoes just because the outsoles seem fine. If the midsoles are shot, it's time for new shoes.

Q: What else can I do?

A: Mileage isn't everything, but some runners use their training logs to track how many miles they run in each pair of shoes they own. Not a bad idea. Other runners write the date of purchase somewhere on the shoe. That way, they know when several months have passed and it's time to start thinking about a new pair.

Q: How many miles can I reasonably expect out of my running shoes?

A: Okay, you know we don't want to answer that question because there are so many variables. But, if pushed, we'll say you should get at least 350 miles from a solid training shoe, and you can reasonably expect another 100 or 200 miles. You'll probably get fewer from a lightweight trainer and far fewer from racing shoes. Some runners, particularly those who have efficient running form, get as much as 700 to 800 miles from their training shoes.