

The single most important piece of equipment you must purchase as a runner is a pair of shoes. With some exceptions, it doesn't much matter how you dress. You can get by without a heart rate monitor, or a treadmill, or a computer diary for recording your workouts, but you won't get very far without a comfortable pair of running shoes.

A "cheap pair of sneakers" will suffice the first week or two, when you're only walking and/or jogging a mile or two every other day. In fact, I even recommend that you not shop before you run. Grab whatever footwear is in your closet. Just get out the door first, then worry about equipment. Once you've made a commitment to running, then you need a pair of shoes that have been specially designed for your new sport.

You don't need to spend a lot of money. In fact, some of the best shoes for beginners might be described as "middle-priced." Here are some facts about shoes to know the first time you enter a running store, courtesy Bob Wischnia, who writes the shoe advice column for Runner's World Online:

PRICE: Be prepared to spend at least \$75, but probably not more than \$90.

BRAND: Your greatest concern should be fit--not air, gel, pump or various other well-advertised items. Make absolutely certain the shoes fit, allowing some extra room in the toe box.

SIZE: Have your feet measured, even if you think you know your shoe size. (You may have larger feet than you think.) Athletic shoes are notorious for being small, so don't be concerned if what fits is a half size or more larger than your "normal" street-shoe size.

SOCKS: Bring along the socks you plan to wear while running, not dress socks that may be thinner, thus affecting the fit of the shoes in the store.

HYPE: Don't be swayed by the salesperson's pitch, or what the store has "on sale" at a lower price. Go with your instincts and what feels best on your feet. Walk around the store. Jog a little in the shoes. Spend some time. Listen to what the salesperson says, but they may or may not be knowledgeable about what they're selling.