

# Hiking Shoes

Find the right boot for your hiking needs.

The most basic and essential piece of equipment that each hiker should own is good footwear. While you can generally get away with borrowing most gear from others, everyone should at least have their own pair of hiking shoes or boots. Since no two sets of feet are alike, the shape of a shoe becomes unique to its owner during the breaking in period. Hiking shoes can generally be divided into four separate categories which are explained at the end of this article.

Of course the type of shoe you decide to purchase will coincide with your needs. However, there are some basics to keep in mind when buying your very own boots:

**Evening shopping.** Believe it or not, your feet are actually larger at the end of day than in the morning. People who are on their feet all day could easily relate to that swollen feeling. Shopping in the evening will ensure a better fit for the conditions your feet are likely to find themselves in on the trail.

**Wear the proper socks.** If you are going to wear hiking socks on the trail, then it makes sense to wear them when trying on the footwear in which you plan to hike.

**Walk around.** Since you probably wouldn't buy a car without going on a test drive, it's important to take your boots for a spin while in the store. If your arches feel a little funny after a brief walk around the store, imagine how they will feel after several miles. Some stores have an incline you can use to simulate walking up and down hills. You could even jump on small inclines to mimic the effect of going downhill. Make sure your toes are not scrunched up in an ill-fitting boot.

**What to look for.** When trying on hiking footwear, the most important criteria are comfort and fit. The footwear must comply well with the shape of your feet, allowing a bit more room at the toe than you may be accustomed to. The heel of the shoe should lock your heel firmly into place and not allow it to "piston" up and down. The boot should hold your foot securely, not allowing it to twist or tip over. Your foot should feel good as soon as you put on the shoe, preferably without the need for a lot of breaking-in. Traction is also important. Look for a tread a bit deeper than the average running shoe. Don't be afraid to ask a salesperson for assistance. Some may be able to recommend boots based on your walking style or foot shape.



**If the shoe fits, wear it.** All the advice in the world from even the most knowledgeable of salespeople can not hold a candle to the opinion of your own feet. Try on several different pairs of boots to find out what feels the best. Common sense will likely guide you to a good fit.

**Break it in.** Break-in your footwear with short hikes, going out for a mile or two at first, and then lengthening the hikes as the shoes' comfort increases. Wear your boots to work or around the house in case they do get uncomfortable. Some stores will allow you to return boots so long as they haven't been scuffed up.

### Types of Hiking Footwear

	Features	Uses	Other considerations
<b>Trail runners</b>	Like a sneaker, but lighter, and with better tread	Designed for trail running or light hikes	Unless pack is very light, not appropriate for long hikes
<b>Trail shoes</b>	Also low-cut like a sneaker, but stiffer than a trail runner and with even better tread	Perfect for hiking along easy-moderate terrain	Slightly heavier and more supportive than trail runners, ideal for a wide variety of moderate hikes
<b>Light hiking boots</b>	Sturdier, higher-cut boots that come up over the ankle bone, often combine breathable fabrics and leather	Hiking in a variety of conditions, including challenging terrain	Should be considered if you have weak or damaged ankles, for hikes in snow/cold weather, or with packs that exceed 35 lbs
<b>Heavy hiking boots</b>	Heavy-duty footwear, usually with a stiffer midsole	Strenuous climbing and backpacking in difficult terrain with a pack that weighs more than 40 lbs.	Heavy, more expensive, and usually not practical for day hikes or hikes without very challenging terrain. May take longer to break in.



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