

PERFECT FIT

AS MORE RUNNERS APPRECIATE THE BENEFITS OF USING INSOLES AND ORTHOTICS TO IMPROVE THE FIT AND PERFORMANCE OF THEIR SHOE – AND HELP WITH INJURY PREVENTION – **DANNY ORR**, A SPECIALIST IN RUNNING BIOMECHANICS AND FOOTWEAR, AND OUR RESIDENT PODIATRIST, LOOKS AT THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO AND EXAMINES WHEN TO BUY OFF-THE-SHELF – OR GO BESPOKE

As all runners know, proper fitting and functioning footwear is the key ingredient to ensure enjoyable, injury-free running.

A runner's footwear must protect the body from large impact forces, reduce rotation of the feet and lower legs, and keep the feet comfortable, supported and injury free.

With many runners opting for longer distances such as half and full marathon – and the associated training loads these events require – the chance of injury increases due to the additional training and the increase in repetitive stress we are placing on our bodies.

For those runners looking to

enhance the protective properties of a new shoe, or revive a shoe that has experienced a good number of miles, a replacement insole/orthotic is a third important footwear element.

In most cases, the insole that comes with a shoe is a thin foam unit designed to insulate the foot from the rougher materials and seams within the shoe, and rarely provides the cushioning or stability required.

Insole products and or orthotics can provide a significant increase in comfort, performance and relief from a variety of foot and leg related injuries.

An important definition is to know when to purchase an 'off-the-shelf' insole and when to purchase a custom orthotic from a podiatrist.



INSOLES

Insoles come in two different types: cushioning (sorbothane, soft sole) and support (footdisc, superfeet). Support insoles are what we are going to concentrate on: these are off-the-shelf products that are designed to support the foot better within the shoe, helping protect the foot and maximise the shoes' potential. Insoles will also reduce shock, improve the fit of the shoe, reduce foot fatigue and absorb moisture eliminating friction and odour. All of these elements add up to increased comfort, efficiency and performance.

Off-the-shelf insoles are often a credible solution for minor injuries and functional issues, and many podiatrists use these very products for patients with these types of problems.

As an example for regular runners that develop blisters, shin pain, knee discomfort and lower backache, a good insole product can have a very positive effect on these 'niggling' running injuries.

Incorrectly, we do not seek this solution unless we have an injury concern that is preventing us from reaching our training goals or training at all. Insoles can help prevent injuries from ever occurring, as it is often the silent damage occurring within our joints that can be prevented before it is too late - and you are forced to take a break from running.

ORTHOTICS

A prescribed orthotic is designed to increase the mechanical efficiency of the foot. It compensates for any structural or postural instability in the foot, thereby relieving abnormal stresses on the lower body by promoting better alignment.

Orthotics can be prescribed to eliminate acute or chronic pain as they are engineered to mirror your foot's contours perfectly, providing optimum support and stability. This helps eliminate more severe function issues, by eliminating biomechanical inefficiencies helping the foot, ankle and lower leg work in better symmetry.

Where off-the-shelf insoles will often help overcome general shin pain, using a prescribed custom orthotics will have a greater effect on long-term soft tissue shin problems and stress fractures.

Something to bear in mind is that if you have a predisposed medical condition, it is always a good idea to let a specialist assess your running gait prior to undertaking serious mileage. If you have had an ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) repair due to a skiing accident, just because the injury was not due to running does not mean that your knee won't feel it now, or in the future as mileage increases. Therefore it is important to protect against future damage to the area by ensuring that one's alignment is as good as it should be.



'RUNNING FOOTWEAR CAN HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT ON LEG ALIGNMENT. HOWEVER, TO IMPROVE THE FUNCTION OR POSTURE OF THE FOOT YOU MAY NEED TO INCLUDE AN ORTHOTIC DEVICE'

**IAN LENIHAN PODIATRIST
FOOT AND LEG PAIN
CLINIC, MAIDSTONE.**

FINAL WORD

Off-the-shelf insoles can be a fantastic addition to any running shoe. They will provide increased cushioning, support, and comfort making these insoles a worthwhile addition to all running footwear.

If you are suffering from an injury, before seeking prescription orthotics, people with less severe problems could consider testing the lower-priced, over-the-counter insoles, as very often they can provide sufficient protection to help overcome your various injury concerns.

However, if these injuries persist and/or become more severe, or you have habitual problems that you have tried numerous times to overcome and failed, it would be worthwhile contacting your local sports injuries clinic, or podiatry practice and find a medical solution to the problem.

What's in the **off-the-shelf market?**

SUPERFEET

72%

www.superfeet.co.uk

Superfeet has been around for a long time and has become a tried and tested safe choice. Due to the solid construction, the product will last a long time, but can also feel fairly rigid. Superfeet insoles are a generic shape that will suit most foot profiles. There are now new products in the market that are running specific and therefore warrant a try.



Fit for Purpose	7
Customisation	5
Cushioning	7
Support	9
Weight (72g)	8

SOFSOLE

70%

www.sofsole.com

The Sof Sole Athlete shock absorber insole is the maximum cushioning device produced by Sof Sole. The insole has rear and forefoot inserts designed to provide extra support for important areas of the foot. These insoles provide fantastic cushioning but do little to support and align the foot. You might want something with more motion control properties.



Fit for Purpose	8
Customisation	5
Cushioning	9
Support	5
Weight (68g)	8

SORBOTHANE

66%

www.ib-sorbothane.com

The Sorbothane Shock Stopper double strike insole has been at the forefront of cushioning insoles for a long time. The visco-elastic polymer material provides excellent shock absorption, vastly improving the cushioned feel of the running shoes. Despite the cushioning, there is little foot support. Due to the weight of the insoles, they can make the footwear feel a little sluggish.



Fit for Purpose	8
Customisation	5
Cushioning	9
Support	5
Weight (73g)	6

ORTHAHEEL

70%

www.walkpainfree.co.uk

Orthaheel sport insoles have been developed alongside the medical products designed by the Vasily podiatry company. The insoles are more low profile than the others featured, and therefore fit well into narrower tighter fitting shoes. The insoles are very similar to the ones designed to go in low profile every day shoes, and are therefore quite rigid for running shoes and often work better and feel more comfortable in every day footwear. Could do with being running specific.



Fit for Purpose	5
Customisation	5
Cushioning	7
Support	9
Weight (45g)	9

FOOTDISC

BEST IN TEST

www.footdisc.co.uk

Footdisc are the first running insoles that takes into account the very specific technologies in running shoes, and looks to enhance these technologies as well as support the foot. Footdisc is a semi-custom insole device that has taken the three major foot types (high arch, normal arch, low arch) and designed a unique insole for each one highlighting the differences in arch profile, cushioning and stability needed. These are sport specific and therefore geared for runners' needs.



Fit for Purpose	9
Customisation	7
Cushioning	9
Support	8
Weight (44g)	9

84%

SOLE

76%

www.sole.co.uk

Sole makes two different running insoles, ULTRA and REGULAR. The ULTRA version is better cushioned for a more recreational runner and the REGULAR for lighter weight more efficient runners. SOLE insoles are heat mouldable, and can be customised for each foot, however this needs to occur with the foot in the correct position or there is very little benefit to wearing them. Designed for multiple sports, of which running is one, they're a solid second in our test.



Fit for Purpose	7
Customisation	8
Cushioning	7
Support	8
Weight (68g)	8