

Buying Shoes. It's Never Been Fun.

I always Dreamed of Being Able to Walk in Crystal Slippers

From Polio Survivor and Primary Care Physician

[Dr. Marny Eulberg, MD](#)

During my childhood I remember dreaming about shoes that were anything other than brown or black leather orthopedic shoes that a brace could be attached to. It was a big day when I got a pair of black and white saddle shoes! Oh how I longed for a pair of red shoes or black or white patent leather Mary Janes, like the other girls wore when they were dressed up. I hate to think of how much money I have spent on shoes that I hoped would work for me to only discover that they made me too unstable, hurt my foot, or did not work with my brace(s).

For anyone with an abnormal gait/way of walking, the best shoe is one that has a sole that is flat or nearly flat from side to side and from the heel to the toe (see image to the right). A shoe that has a wide toe box is more stable than one with a narrow-pointed toe. Stability is enhanced if the bottom of the sole is slightly wider than where the sole meets the shoe. A leather sole provides the least amount of traction which can be great for dancing and are less likely to cause tripping on thick carpet. A rubber or similar material provides the best traction



but may make it more likely to trip when walking on carpet. Examples of shoes that have flat or nearly flat soles are skateboard shoes (think Vans, etc), court shoes – either for playing basketball or tennis such as Converse, or boat shoes used by those walking around the decks of slippery boats.

The ideal shoe to wear with a brace fits closely around the brace and the foot, holding you snugly and comfortably within it, and has a sole that sets flat on the ground, including around the edges, in order to provide maximum stability when standing and walking. Your foot, the shoe, and the brace should function as one solid unit.

If you are a new brace wearer, the shoe you need on your braced foot may need to be $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 shoe size larger and/or wider than the shoe you wore on your foot before it was braced. Frequently one can get more room in the shoe by removing the insole(s). For some polio survivors, this may mean you now can wear the same size shoes on both feet! You may be able to get the orthotist to make the foot plate on your brace the same size as your larger foot so you can wear the same size shoes on both feet. Sometimes it means getting all new shoes and, at times, beginning a frustrating, time-consuming, and sometimes expensive process of finding shoes that will fit around the brace and serve your needs.

For those who need mis-mated shoes (one size on one foot and another size on another foot), some options may be: getting shoes from Nordstrom's. As long as there is at least a $1 \frac{1}{2}$ shoe size difference between the two shoes, Nordstrom's will only charge you the price of one pair for shoes, even though they are a different size. If you ask, some shoe stores may discount the second pair with or without some restrictions.

You may be able to find mis-mated shoes from an organization such as National Odd Shoe Exchange (www.oddshoe.org). In addition, this website, <https://www.abilityhacker.com/where-to-buy-shoes-when-your-feet-are-two-different-sizes/> lists resources for mis-mated shoes.

There also is a website www.oddshoefinder.com that lists single shoes or mis-mated shoes for sale offered by persons with extra shoes for others who wear those sizes to purchase. If you have purchased two pairs of shoes and have the extra mis-mated shoes that you cannot wear,

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you can offer them for sale on the Odd Shoe Finder [website](#) or donate them to N.O.S.E. (the National Odd Shoe Exchange). You will need to pay the postage/shipping to N.O.S.E. but the cost of the one donated pair and any shipping costs are tax-deductible as a charitable donation. (You may want to contact them by phone: 480-892-3484).

A few companies have begun to recognize and respond to some of the challenges experienced by those with limited hand/arm function or wearing braces to put on standard shoes. Shoes with Velcro closures have been available for several years.

There now are some additional options including shoes that flex at the heel when putting the shoe on and then pop back up so the need to tie shoelaces may be avoided—examples: Kizik, Zeba, and Nike FlyEase.



The shoes of BILLY Footwear, www.billyfootwear.com, incorporate a zipper that go along the outside and around the toe, allowing the upper of each shoe to open and fold over completely. Thus, the wearer can place his or her foot onto the footbed unobstructed. Then with a tug on the zipper-pull the shoe closes and secures overtop the user's foot. All of these companies have some limited size/width options.

Are these ideas going to help everyone? No, but they may help many of the readers who struggle finding shoes. The biggest challenges will be for those who wear an adult sized shoe on one foot and child or youth size on the other foot, those who wear a woman's size on one foot and man's size on the other, those needing a very wide or very narrow shoe, those who need a custom-made shoe, and finding styles other than casual shoes.

Individuals who use a brace that attaches directly to the shoe or uses a stirrup built into the heel of the shoe are having increased difficulty finding leather shoes, especially women's leather oxford type shoes. If it still can meet a person's needs, it may be useful to talk to an orthotist about converting the brace to one that has a footplate, one design is called a UCB (University of California, Berkeley) footplate, that goes around your foot and heel and will fit inside a shoe eliminating the need to have a leather heel on the shoe.

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*An important note from Dr. Eulberg: I have never needed to shop for or purchase men's shoes or unusual sizes, so likely I did not discuss all the challenges faced by men, those who need custom shoes, or wear the more limited sizes.



**Dr. Eulberg's series of Articles and Videos are in
"Primary Care Perspective".**

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