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TOP TIPS FOR THE BEST SHOE FIT

Something every dancer wants to do is avoid buying and breaking-in new shoes. One word comes to mind: PAIN! So, the real question is, are you being properly fitted for both your hard/heavy and soft shoes? *IDM* turns to industry leaders for their expert advice.

One of the things dancers and their parents worry about is how long a dancer should be in the same dance shoes, as their number one priority is keeping their dancer injury-free. However, with a mind to a family's budget most only want to

switch shoes when/if it is needed but when exactly is that? Dr. Carrie Skony, a Certified Chiropractic Sports Physician & Dance Medicine Specialist, makes some interesting points about Irish Dancing shoes which contrasts with how many people purchase their Irish Dance shoes today.

"Soft shoes do not offer structural support. They offer compression, which is not the same thing. If I had to choose, I'd pick a worn-in soft shoe over a brand-new one because the leather is more forgiving and allows more foot function in a broken-in shoe. When the foot can function, the muscles of the foot can create an arch, and thus support the foot," says Skony.

One takeaway as it applies to Irish Dancing could be for dancers to use well-worn soft shoes for most of their dance time and reserve tight-fitting shoes for the competition stage. In addition, Dr. Skony suggests that when it comes to foot health, soft shoes should last longer than hard shoes, which also contrasts with how the Irish Dancing shoe industry works today, with many dancers replacing their soft shoes frequently and holding onto their hard shoes for as long as possible.

Skony explains, "Runners, for example,



get new shoes every 300–500 miles. For growing adolescents in sports, I typically recommend being refitted every six months to accommodate changes in length/width of the foot, and adaptations to strength/function. I'd suggest this would be appropriate for Irish Dancers as well."

Dr. Skony provides food for thought for parents and dancers alike. The point is clear, proper fit is vital to staying injury-free. It makes perfect sense that growing dancers should get their shoes checked every six months to ensure they are wearing the best shoe for their foot.

WHAT SIZE DO I NEED?

So, now you are considering buying new shoes, but what size do you need? Tina White of Rutherford Products has been manufacturing and distributing dance shoes for decades. Over the years she has seen that the best fit for a dancer is tight



Coughlin Irish Imports stresses the importance of an in-person fitting. Shoe pictured: Fays Ultra Flexi with black suede sole

when first purchased, because Rutherford's leather will stretch to comfort over the course of wear. "Over time and as the dancer progresses up through the levels of competition, everyone seems to be on target with a good tight fit. Never should a dancer in any category buy a pair of shoes that are easy to get into."

White also says there is very little difference in half sizes, so a beginner parent does have a little leniency to get a good fit for their child without going big for growth. But, she cautions, "The shoes will stretch and get bigger even if they are big to begin with. That is the problem with buying big. A more advanced dancer basically buys the shoes too small and then lets them stretch for comfort."

Shannen Peacock of Feis Fayre concurs, "We recommend starting one full size down from your regular street shoe in a standard fit. From there, establish the width. If going wide we recommend a size and a half down, for example if you wear a size 3 street shoe start with a 1.5 wide."

Anne Maria Papageorge of Coughlin's Irish Imports stresses that a dancer should fit for their current size instead of allowing room for growth. "Any extra room in a dancer's shoe allows the foot to slide around and prohibits them from having maximum control of their feet; also a foot sliding around in a shoe sets a dancer up for injury."

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY SHOE IS TOO SMALL?

"If a dancer starts to have pain in the toes or heels its generally too small. Also, when



Rutherford's ULTRA-LITE is a popular choice amongst dancers

a heel is popping out of shoe it is another telltale sign that the shoes need to be replaced," explains Papageorge. She also stresses that for those wearing orthotics inside their shoes, they should be sure to get fitted for their shoes with their orthotics, so that the shoes will be the correct size.

Peacock shares that the telltale sign that a shoe is too small is when a dancer's heel is pushing out over the back of the heel of the shoe and/or if the dancer is unable to go on their toes. But, she cautions, the problem may not be the size, it may be the width of the shoe and she highly recommends dancers to get fitted in person, where possible, for their new shoes.



Dancer Mia Robinson loves the fit of her Feis Fayre Shoes

White says that in addition to the heel falling, the only true way to tell a dancer is fitted properly is to go to a feis or major and see what is recommended for a new size. "Compare that to the old size. A half size difference is not enough to justify a new pair of shoes. The shoes have already stretched a half size and more. If a new size is at least one size bigger than the old size, it's time for a new pair of shoes." **IDM**

Be sure to check out the upcoming September/October issue's Foot, Feet and Floor Special where we have an extensive interview with Dr. Skony, in which she addresses why Irish Dancers are seeing so many foot injuries!

