CHOOSING RUNNING SHOES: USAF Basic Military Training (BMT)

What to expect at BMT
All trainees arriving at BMT are issued running shoes. However, if you so choose, you will be allowed to wear running shoes brought from home if in good, working condition. The advantage with bringing your own shoes is much wider selection and being able to break them in and get used to them before the rigorous training of BMT begins. USAF BMT recommends that recruits choose running shoes in accordance with guidance from the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM). Please see: http://www.acsm.org/docs/brochures/running-shoes.pdf

Here are ACSM’s core recommendations:
- **Minimal heel-to-toe drop**: This drop is the difference in thickness of the heel cushion to the thickness in the forefoot cushion area. Shoes with zero to 6mm are the best choice for allowing the foot to function normally (see image below).
- **Neutral**: This means the shoe does not contain motion control or stability components. These extra components interfere with normal foot motion during weight bearing
- **Light in weight**: (10 ounces or less for a men’s size 9, 8 ounces or less for women’s size 8)
- **Wide toe box**: Plenty of space for toes, not too narrow.

Do I need arch support? What if I have high or low arches?
Many years of research has not shown a benefit with arch support for the vast majority of runners, regardless of their foot structure. A NEUTRAL shoe (flexible, light, no arch support) is best for most runners to minimize injury risk and improve performance. Go with a neutral shoe unless another shoe has been prescribed for you by a healthcare provider.

I have some running experience and like my current shoes. Should I change shoes?
The reasoning, “if it’s not broken, don’t fix it” has a lot of truth to it. That being said, you may find improved performance with a shoe that is lighter weight or has less heel-to-toe drop.

How can I get a better running shoe?
Stores that specialize in running shoes generally have better selection and more knowledgeable staff. Online purchasing may be another good option if you choose your size carefully. Keep in mind that significant changes to the type of shoe you run in should be made slowly, over several weeks to months, to allow your body to adapt to the change. “Breaking in” a shoe is not necessary if the shoe is light and flexible, but may take 2-3 weeks of regular running for stiffer shoes. It is recommended to alternate new shoes with your old ones until they are broken in and your body has adapted.

How important is running form?
Good running form is critical, even more important than having the best shoe. The shoe doesn’t run...you run! Focus on a light, quick cadence (step rate around 170-180 steps/min. Use a metronome app on your phone). Try to avoid over-striding, which is when you land with your foot outstretched in front of you. This type of landing creates a hard impact versus a nice touch and spring. Pace should be easy to moderate, especially if you have not been running regularly.