Rappahannock Foot & Ankle Specialists
PODIATRISTS - SURGEONS
Restoring Active Fulfilling Lives One Foot At A Time

2026 FOOTWEAR GUIDE

A practical, podiatrist-reviewed starting point for athletic, walking, work and everyday shoes.

The goal is not to find the "best shoe." The goal is to find the shoe that best matches your foot shape, activity, comfort, stability needs and - when prescribed - your custom foot orthoses.

HOW TO CHOOSE A SHOE

1. Fit first	Have both feet measured. Fit the larger foot. Your toes should have room to move, your heel should feel secure, and an athletic shoe should feel comfortable immediately - not after a "break-in" period.
2. Match the activity	Running shoes are designed primarily for forward motion. Court sports and gym activities with frequent side-to-side movement benefit from sport-specific footwear with greater lateral stability.
3. Choose the right support category	Neutral/cushioned shoes work well for many people. Stability shoes add guidance and structure for patients who benefit from greater motion control. More support is not automatically better.
4. Orthotic-friendly matters	If you wear custom foot orthoses, look for adequate depth, a secure heel counter, sufficient width, and preferably a removable factory sockliner. Remove the factory insole before inserting your orthoses unless your podiatrist instructs otherwise.

CURRENT ATHLETIC & WALKING STARTING POINTS

Category	Examples to try	What to look for
Stability / guidance	ASICS GEL-KAYANO 33, GT-2000 15 Brooks Adrenaline GTS 25, Glycerin GTS 23, Beast GTS 26 HOKA Gaviota 6, Arahi 8 On Cloudrunner 3	Stable platform, secure rearfoot, comfortable guidance without forcing the foot.
Neutral / cushioned	Brooks Ghost 18, Ghost Max 3, Glycerin 23 HOKA Bondi 9, Clifton 11 On Cloudmonster 3	Comfortable cushioning, smooth transition, enough base width and depth for your foot and orthoses.
Walking / all-day	Brooks Addiction Walker 2 HOKA Bondi 9 / Bondi SR Selected New Balance walking models SAS walking shoes	Durable outsole, stable heel, appropriate width, low-friction upper, and adequate volume.

FOOTWEAR BY ACTIVITY

Model lines change frequently. Use these as reliable categories and examples, then choose the specific shoe that fits your foot best.

Trail running / light hiking	Examples: Brooks Cascadia 19; HOKA Speedgoat 7; selected ASICS, Altra, Merrell, KEEN and Oboz trail models. Priorities: traction, stable platform, toe protection, secure heel and enough forefoot room.
Tennis / pickleball / court sports	Examples: ASICS GEL-Resolution family; adidas Barricade family; K-Swiss court models; New Balance court models. Priorities: lateral stability, durable outsole and a secure upper. Do not substitute a soft running shoe for repeated cutting movements.
Cross-training / gym	Examples: purpose-built training shoes from Nike, Reebok, New Balance, adidas and others. Priorities: flatter, stable base for lifting; lateral control for agility; enough flexibility for the planned workout. Running shoes are best reserved for running/walking.
Work / extra-depth	Brands to consider: Aetrex, Apex, Drew, Dr. Comfort, Orthofeet and selected New Balance models. Priorities: depth, width options, removable inserts, stable heel counter and accommodation for braces/orthoses when needed.
Dress / casual	Brands to consider: Aetrex, Dansko, ECCO, Naot, Rockport, Finn Comfort, Munro, Allen Edmonds and selected Cole Haan models. Priorities: secure heel, adequate toe-box shape, modest heel height, stable sole and sufficient internal volume.
Sandals / recovery	Brands to consider: Birkenstock, Aetrex, Naot, Finn Comfort and selected supportive recovery sandals. Priorities: contoured footbed, stable sole and straps that hold the foot. Backless footwear is generally less secure for prolonged walking.

IF YOU WEAR CUSTOM FOOT ORTHOSES

✓ **Bring your orthoses when shoe shopping.**	Test the complete shoe-orthosis system, not the shoe alone.
✓ **Remove the factory sockliner when possible**	before inserting prescription orthoses. This preserves internal depth and reduces crowding.
✓ **Do not automatically size up.**	Width, depth, last shape and heel fit matter as much as numerical size.
✓ **Let symptoms guide the final choice.**	If a shoe creates focal pressure, numbness, rubbing or new pain, it is not the right match even if the model is highly rated.

Need help choosing footwear?

Your RFAS podiatrist can match shoe characteristics to your diagnosis, biomechanics, activity and custom orthoses.

Scan to learn about RFAS 3D custom foot orthoses.

Important: This guide is educational and is not a substitute for an individualized examination. Shoe models and specifications change. Patients with diabetes, neuropathy, circulation problems, significant deformity, bracing needs or persistent pain should obtain individualized footwear advice.

Sources reviewed for this 2026 update: American Podiatric Medical Association (shoe selection and sport-specific footwear); Road Runner Sports (fit, stability vs. neutral footwear and current 2026 models); current manufacturer model information from ASICS, Brooks, HOKA and On. Original RFAS source handout updated from the 2022 ProLab shoe recommendation list.