

Weekend Doctor

By **DR. THOMAS F. VAIL**

Ice skating is an excellent way to enjoy the winter weather and get some exercise. But ice skating can quickly lose its appeal if your feet begin to hurt.

Ice skating and ice skates are associated with several common foot ailments including calluses, blisters and ankle problems. Because of the risks ice sports pose with falling, it is important for skaters to purchase the proper shoe for the activity they will be doing.

It is also important to be fit by a trained professional whenever buying a new pair of skates.

Hockey skates are made to move, turn and stop quickly on the ice. The skate has a curved shape and a hollow blade. This helps the skater with speed and agility.

A figure skate has a toe pick, curved blade, long blade and leather boots. These features help the figure skater to execute jumps, turns and deep knee bends.

Figure skaters need to be especially careful when they are told to point their toes. Most skaters will scrunch up their toes, causing the calf muscle to shorten. If the skater points their foot by extending the ankle, it is much easier on the calf muscle and the knee will straighten with more ease.

For those who have never been ice skating, a figure skate is a good option. The blade allows you to distribute your weight evenly.

Be sure to wear protective socks to avoid blisters. Skaters should also make sure the skates fit properly before getting on the ice.

Try these tips when buying your next pair of skates:

1. Most people have different size left and right feet. Have your feet measured and buy skates to fit your bigger foot.

2. When you measure the length of your feet, make sure you are using the heel-to-ball measurement. This measurement is the most accurate measurement to determine proper length.

3. The proper width measurement of your feet is made by sliding the brannock device to touch the edge of the foot. If a foot has a high instep, it may be necessary to fit an extra width wider. This is where the expertise of your shoe fitting specialist comes into play.

4. Bring the type of socks you will be wearing with your skates. Socks will affect the fit of the boot, especially thick winter socks.

5. Every brand of skates fits differently. Make sure you try on several different brands before deciding on which fits best.

6. Lace the boots firmly with most of the pressure at the top four eyelets. A secure fit is very important.

Boots that are too soft or too stiff can cause several problems and slow down your axels and slap shots. Boots that are too stiff can cause Achilles injury or tendonitis. Boots that are too loose can cause Haglund's deformity, a bony enlargement on the back of the heel.

Remember, foot pain is not normal when you skate. Keep a few second-skin pads and gel pads on hand at your next skating event so you can eliminate the blisters and calluses afterward.

If you are experiencing any of these problems or any problems with your feet and ankles, don't hesitate to see your podiatrist.



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