

Guide to Fitting Skates

FITTING BASICS

There are a few basics that can help you find the right size skates. First, your feet should not move around inside your boots, especially your heel. This can cause blisters and disrupt your balance. Your heel should be as far back into the boot as possible, and should feel snug.

Another important factor is support. Skates that lack adequate support can't hold you up; you wind up using a lot of your muscle power just to stay upright. To determine if a pair of skates offers good support, pick up one of the skates and hold it by the top of the boot. Turn it sideways in the air, so the boot and the blade are horizontal (If you're holding onto the blade-end of the boot, let go). The boot should be strong enough to remain horizontal and support the weight of the blade. If the bottom flops down to form a 90 degree angle, the boots are too weak to support you.

LACING UP

How skates look when they're laced up can offer a clue to how well they fit. When properly laced, there should be an inch or an inch-and-a-half of space between the sides holding the laces. If the boot wrinkles up around the first and second laces, it's too wide for your foot.

When you're ready to lace up, tap your heel into the boot as far as possible. Make sure you keep your foot and the boot in an upright position as you tighten the laces. If you roll your foot sideways while lacing, that's how it will be set in the boot for skating. When you get to the top two hooks, lean forward slightly to allow extra space at the top of the boot - just enough to fit two fingers side-by-side in the back. It might take more than one try to get the boots laced up right, so leave enough time and keep trying till they're both comfortable and snug.

FITTING NEW SKATES

Skates that lack support are basically a waste of money. There's no point in trying to do even basic lessons in skates that don't fit you right or don't provide you with the kind of support you need. They can hamper your learning progress and make you more prone to injury.

We recommend the **Pierce Skate and Ski, 208 West 98th Street, Bloomington (952) 884-1990** and **Westwood Sports, 9601 Garfield Ave S, Bloomington (952) 881-2222** for new or used skates. When being fitted for new skates, be sure to wear thin socks or tights for the best fit.

The position of the ball of the foot in the boot determines whether your arch is where it should be. Your arch has a tendency to center itself. If your skates are a size too big, the ball of your foot is going to wind up where it should be, but your heel will be pulled out of the back of the boot.

New skates should feel snug in the heel. The ball of your foot should be at the widest part of the boot. There should be contact between the side of the boot and the foot, and no wrinkling or distortion around the toes.

MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

If a particular spots on your foot or ankle hurts, adjustments can usually be made to accommodate bunions, corns or little bones that stick out. But new skates should *not* feel completely comfortable right away. If they feel really good when they're new, they are too big. They are going to stretch out - a lot. We worry a whole lot more about skates being too loose than too tight. Too tight you can usually fix; too loose you can't do a whole lot with.

If you're thinking about buying used skates, use the flop test. If the boots are weak and broken down, don't waste your money. When purchasing new skates also make sure to check the blades for nicks and severe rust.

Skating is a lot of fun and a true challenge for those who wish to master the sport. Good equipment is part of the picture and directly affects your ability to skate.