

Boot Fitting Information

Having good footwear is necessary for success. Please follow these instructions carefully when fitting hiking boots for your NOLS course. It may be helpful to show these instructions to the boot fitter. Your hiking boots are one of the most important pieces of equipment you will use during your course. For this reason, please travel to your course with them on your feet or in your carry-on luggage.

It is imperative that boots fit correctly to minimize the chance of blisters or other foot injuries.

It's All in the Fit

In our experience, we have found that a properly fitted boot is more important than a "broken in" boot. Many people still believe the myth that a break-in period is important. It's not as important as finding boots that fit.

1. It is best to shop for boots in the afternoon since feet tend to swell during the day. Always fit your larger foot. The key to a proper fit is to determine the correct length. A boot that is too small (short) will cause more problems than one that is too large. Boots should fit comfortably with *either* two pairs of heavy wool socks or one pair of liner socks and one pair of heavy wool socks. Both systems work fine. Wearing two pairs of socks provides warmth, cushioning and wicks moisture away from the skin, helping to reduce the chance of blisters.
2. Start with a boot a half size larger than your normal street shoe size and slip your foot in barefoot. Some boot shops may ask you to wear a thin liner sock. Slide your foot forward until your toes touch the front of the boot. As you lean forward slightly, there should be approximately 1/2" to 3/4" (about one finger width) between your heel and the back of the boot. If there is not, the boot is probably too small and you should try a half size larger.
3. Now try on the boots with your favorite combination of two pairs of socks and lace the boots snugly. Your toes should be comfortable at the front of the boot, with just a little bit of room to wiggle, and the arch of the boot fitting comfortably under your instep. Walk around the store for a few minutes. Your heels should feel snug in the back of the boot with just enough room to barely lift off the insole of the boot about 1/8"; no heel lift is too little, 1/4" or more is too much. The boot should feel comfortable with no obvious discomfort or pressure points.
4. In a properly fitted boot, your toes will not jam the front of the boot when walking downhill. To determine this in the store, either kick your foot against a solid wall or, if the store has one, walk down a ramp to simulate hiking downhill. If your toes hit on the first kick, or if they jam the front of the boot walking down the ramp, the boot is probably too small or not laced tight enough. Your toes should "nudge" against the front of the boot on the third kick. It is important to realize that a properly fitted boot is going to feel slightly big. It is better to have a boot a bit large than too small.
5. Getting the proper fit takes time. Not all boots fit the same, so try different brands and models. Walk around the store for at least 10 minutes. Think about your feet. Are they comfortable? Any pressure points? If so, try a different width, a different brand or a half size larger. Remember, it's your feet and your comfort, so take your time!