

What to Look for When Buying Your First Pair of Skates

In General:

Skate sizes run smaller than street shoe sizes. A well-fit skate will have a snug or “glove like” feel around the foot. The toes should be able to wiggle but the heel should not be able to lift in the skate. You should NOT be able to move the foot from side to side in the heel, middle or ball of the foot. Skates are commonly sold in narrow, medium and wide sizes. It is important to purchase skates at a skater's current size and not a size up with the expectation that they will grow into the skate. It is very difficult to control a skate that is too big. This will slow a skater's ability to progress especially as they work on more difficult skills.

Ankle Support:

As a skater grows in size and strength, the stiffness of a skate will increase; however, even in entry level skates (for all ages) there should be good lateral or side-to-side ankle support. Squeeze the sides of the skate in the area of the low part of the ankle. It should feel stiff. In a good skate, this part of the boot will have reinforcement built into the skate. The upper leather part or ankle of the skate should NEVER be able to fold over.

Ankle Flex:

Even though the skate should give the skater good lateral (side to side) ankle support the skater should still be able to bend forward at the ankle. Have the skater stand with both skates completely laced and have them bend at the ankles. They should be able to make the boot flex as they bend their ankle. If the skater cannot flex the boot, the boot may be too stiff for their body weight and strength. Higher quality skates will also have design modifications that make it easier to bend at the ankle.

Padding:

As skate quality increases the amount of padding in common pressure point areas increases. We highly recommend looking for skates that at least have tongue padding. Padding around the cuff is also a plus, although we do not recommend “cushy” skates as too much padding will make the skate difficult to control. If the skater does end up with pressure points under the laces (lace bite) or other pressure points around the ankles or cuff of the skate you can invest in a pair of “Bunga Pads”. These are a gel sleeve made specifically for skating. They add a thin cushion at the upper ankles which is a common area of pressure points. Sometimes these pressure points disappear on their own once a new skate is broken in.

Shopping:

When shopping for skates make sure you bring skating tights or trouser socks to wear while trying skates on. The thinner the sock, the more control a skater will have in their skate. Have the skater lace up the boot as they normally would when skating. Assist in holding down the skate on the floor while the skater tests to see if there is any heel lift or lateral movement anywhere in the foot. Do this with straight ankles and with flexed ankles. Have the skater walk around with the skates on. Check for any pinching or pressure points. Make sure the skater can wiggle their toes and that there are no pressure points or pinching anywhere on the foot or ankle.

If the skate has a removable insole, pull it out and look at how the skater's foot fits over the insole—this is very helpful when fitting skates for children, since they often can't tell how close their toes are to the end of the boot. If the insole is not removable, have the skater press their toes up against the front of the boot and see if you can fit a finger behind the heel while the toes touch the front of the boot. If you can, the skates are too big.

If you have any questions about fitting or purchasing skates. Please ask a JSC coach.