

DO YOU REALLY NEED THIS?

Recovery Shoes

After a road race, footwear with maxed-out cushioning and extra arch support feel great. Whether they get you back to walking like a normal person any sooner is up for discussion. **by ASHLEY MATEO**

▶ Recovery shoes, sandals, and slip-ons are supposed to reduce post-running ache and stiffness, and speed recovery. Okabashi, Superfeet, Oofos, Hoka One One, and other companies make footwear featuring huge, foamy footbeds and exaggerated soles. The shoes have an athletic-meets-orthopedic look that is, at best, dorky. And if they work, maybe looks don't matter. But the evidence that they do is somewhat patchy.

The Science

There's some promising research. Oofos says it uses foam that absorbs 37 percent more impact than traditional foam footwear materials and has an arch design that reduces ankle exertion by up to 20 percent; however, that data comes from a brand-sponsored University of Virginia lab study. Also, shoes with unstable rocker soles—in this case, MBT sneakers—were shown to enhance recovery in lower leg

and thigh muscles from damage induced by marathon running, according to a 2018 study published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Science in Sports*.

The Verdict

"There's really no good scientific research that shows these shoes make a difference," says Steven Neufeld, M.D., a foot and ankle surgeon at the Centers for Advanced Orthopaedics in Falls Church, Virginia.

Part of the issue is there's no real way to measure "recovery," says Mark Cucuzzella, M.D., a professor at the West Vir-

ginia University School of Medicine and director of the Natural Running Center. "The shoes may correlate with recovery, but there's no certain causal relationship."

This is not to say these companies are taking advantage of our recovery-obsessed fitness culture, because force placed on feet obviously matters. It's a question of biomechanics. "These shoes are trying to absorb the stress that's distributed across the foot when walking," Neufeld says. In reality, it's your entire lower body—including hips, ankles, knees, Achilles tendons, and foot tissue and arches—which is designed to deal with the force off the ground and take pressure off feet. "Having an inch of foam plays a very small role compared with that," Cucuzzella says.

Regardless of what the science says, these shoes are like walking on clouds, which, for many of us, is all the justification needed after covering serious mileage. Who cares if you look a little dorky? ■

▼ Superfeet ME3D Aftersport (\$100) are custom made to your feet at 200 running stores in the U.S. Sure, the science is iffy. But—damn—they feel good.



Foam footwear aside, cover your recovery bases: Hydrate, eat carbs, and book a massage.