

## 6: Sports Sandals

Despite initial scepticism from outdoor enthusiasts, the Sports Sandal has firmly established itself as a valid footwear category over the last 20 years. Indeed, due to innovation and investment from companies like Teva, the brand leader, the Sport Sandal is now regarded as an indispensable piece of footwear for any active sports participant.

The original sandals were very simple in construction; die-cut stock sheet rubber sole units with flat nylon webbing. Nowadays there are sport specific sandals for almost any activity: sailing, running, aerobics, rafting and, of course, walking and hiking.

### The anatomy of Sports Sandals

① **Outsole** - this is the part of the sandal that is in contact with the ground and needs to provide grip on wet and dry surfaces, to shed mud and dirt and to be sufficiently abrasion resistant that it doesn't wear out too quickly.

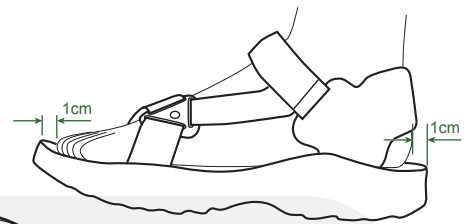
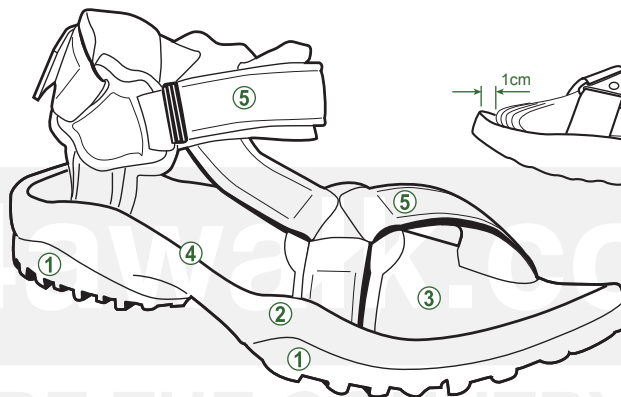
Usually the rubber compound in the sole will determine the grip, particularly on smooth or wet surfaces. The sole pattern will help grip uneven surfaces and it is important that the pattern or 'lugs' do not become clogged with dirt. The amount of abrasion resistance is sometimes a trade-off with grip - softer, grippier soles wear more quickly while harder less grippy soles last longer. *Spider Rubber™* is a special compound developed by **Teva** that gives you superb grip in wet and dry yet offers a longevity found in harder, less grippy, sole units.

② **Midsole** - important because it provides cushioning for the foot, shock absorption and, in dual density midsoles, can help to alleviate pronation. Usually made of EVA, the midsole may have a cut-out for a sorbothane-type shock absorption plug (ShocPad) and a higher density plug on the inside of the heel area to prevent the foot and ankle rolling inwards after the heel strike.

③ **Topsole** - this is the bit you stand on and must be comfortable while providing some grip for the foot (The foot should not be allowed to slip about within the sandal - particularly when wet). Also, the foot can produce a significant amount of perspiration, and, as sandals are typically worn without socks which help absorb perspiration, the combination of the foot (warmth) and the perspiration (wet) produce a perfect micro-climate for the rapid development of bacteria (= *smelly sandals!*). Most quality sandals have some form of bacteria inhibitor in the topsole to help with this problem - **Teva**, for example, use a silver-based, naturally occurring antimicrobial compound (aglON™) that provides permanent protection from odours; other manufacturers use synthetic organic chemicals to achieve a similar result.

④ **Arch Support** - helps the foot attain the correct shape on the shoe or sandal. This shape helps to keep the heel, ankle and lower leg 'in column' reducing foot fatigue and strain on the ankle & knees.

⑤ **Straps** - there are two broad categories of strap - synthetic (nylon, polypropylene etc.) or leather (full grain, waterproof, suede etc). Each have their benefits and drawbacks (see the next section). The patented Universal Strapping System is the most common, although there are other strapping systems available. However, the key to any strapping system is comfort and support. Typically nylon straps are going to be best for rugged and/or continuous use or use around water while leather looks smarter and yet casual - ideal for a summer 'shoe'.



### What to look for when buying sandals

Why are you buying a pair of sandals? What do you envisage doing while wearing sandals? The answers to these questions will guide you to the appropriate sandals for your needs;

**Watersports** - Nylon straps to dry fast, a comfortable footbed and grippy outsole, both in the dry and wet.

**Hiking** - Nylon or leather straps, look for arch support, heel shock pad and cushioning midsole. Look for anti-pronation plugs in the midsole. Outsole should be sufficiently cleated to offer grip on rough terrain.

**Backpacking/Trekking** - Sandal construction integrity and longevity essential - look for straps that are continuous and cannot pull out - failure of the sandals in some remote part of the world could be serious. Arch support and padded straps and posts are also important for comfort. Look for anti-pronation plugs in the midsole. Ensure light weight - you don't want to carry kilos of footwear around with you! Don't use leather or synthetic leather footbeds - they cannot take continuous wear over weeks. Have a pair of leather sandals, or thongs, for casual use.

**Casual Walking** - Leather is perfect for casual sandals. Chose waterproof leather if possible - this will help the sandals absorb less moisture and dry faster. Ideally look for arch support and heel shock pads for comfort. Ensure the straps are soft or padded.

**Running** - Look for a secure fit. Ensure that there is a minimum of movement between the foot and the sandal. Outsole has to provide reasonable grip and there needs to be lots of cushioning in the midsole with shock pad and anti-pronation plug.

**Straps** - Synthetic straps need to be soft - woven, tubular nylon is very strong and supple and dries fast. Of all the synthetics, nylon is best. Polypropylene is sometimes used but is less soft than nylon and can degrade in strong sunlight over an extended period - tends to be found on some of the cheaper sandals. Check that the straps go all the way under the heel and under the fore-foot so that they cannot pull out.

Leather on its own can stretch. Look for leather with nylon backing that helps the straps retain shape. Waterproof leather is best because it absorbs less water when it gets wet. Suede is often used in conjunction with other fabrics such as neoprene or mesh - it is lightweight and supple and very comfortable.

### Fitting

**Heel position** - the heel of the foot should be centred over heel area of the sandal, there should be approximately 1cm between the back of the heel and the back of the sandal.

**Toe clearance** - the longest toes should be 1cm from the front of the sandal, approximately the width of your little finger. Check this is the case when weight is on the sandal.

**Tightening** - Do up the forefoot strap first, not too tight. Put an index finger between the top of the foot and the strap and adjust the Velcro closure to ensure a snug fit. Remove your finger and the strap should be about right. Now do up the ankle strap, use the same technique to ensure it is not too tight.

If you have not worn sandals for a while your feet may be soft. Give your feet a few days to get used to being in the fresh air again - so don't do up your straps too tightly at first!

### Care

Wash your sandals from time to time - the nylon strapped models can usually go into the washing machine - but a scrub in the shower will do no harm and will help to get rid of bacteria. If your sandals do smell try using a little tea tree oil - It works amazingly well.

Do not leave your sandals too close to a strong heat source - includes the parcel shelf of your car in direct sunlight on hot days - this can damage the rubber compounds in the sole units.

The information given in this document has been provided in good faith. It is intended only as a general guide. We advise you to verify the accuracy of information before relying on it. It is the responsibility of individuals to approach outdoor activities such as the one described on this page with caution. The activity described can be strenuous and individuals should ensure they are fit enough before embarking upon it. If in doubt, seek medical advice.

Appropriate equipment and maps should always be carried, along with suitable clothing and footwear. Always follow the Countryside Code. More information about the Countryside Code, clothing, equipment and how to use it can be found on the go4awalk.com website.

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