

# How to Fit Figure Skates

## Beginning Skaters (Beginners and CanSkate)

Getting a pair of skates that fit well and provide good support are essential to an enjoyable and successful skating season. For this level and age group, skates that come with the blade already attached are most common. Here are a few do's and don'ts for skate shopping:

- Do NOT buy skates that are too large, thinking your child will grow into them. If you anticipate a growth spurt, you could buy no more than a half-size larger pair of skates and wear a thicker sock in them at first.
- Ideally, a thin sock or better yet leotards/tights should be worn in skates. Feet actually stay warmer!!!
- Avoid skates that are molded out of plastic - they do not allow for the kind of ankle flexibility needed.
- If buying used skates, be sure there is some sharpening steel left on the blade. There should be a slight curve to the blade, so if it appears to be flat, its lifespan is complete and won't sharpen/skate properly.
- Skaters who play or are intending to play hockey can wear hockey skates. After they've reached a certain level, however, there will be some skills that cannot be achieved on hockey skates.

### *Follow these steps for trying on skates:*

1. Unlace the boot very loosely and pull the tongue forward as far as the laces go.
2. While seated, insert the foot. Slide it all the way forward, being sure to keep toes flat.
3. Check to see if you can insert your index finger behind the heel. Ideally, it's a tight squeeze -- only half a finger width is recommended. If you can get a full finger in, the boot is too long. If you can't fit it in at all, the boot may be too small.
4. Now kick the heel to the very back of the boot. Curl the tongue in around the foot and ankle and do up the laces firmly, but not too tightly. If there is extra lace, do NOT wrap it around the ankle. You can go back down and run it up the hooks of the skate one more time, and/or double knot it at the top.
5. If the sides of the skate are stretched apart so they don't cover the tongue, the boot is too narrow/small. If the sides of the skate appear too close together (almost meeting across the tongue), or if the skate appears to buckle or bubble near the toe seam, the boot is too wide/long.

6. After lacing up both skates, stand up in them. Toes of both feet should be laying flat and NOT touching the ends of either skate.
7. Take a walk in the skates. Heels of both feet should NOT lift at all, and should be snugly in the skate. This is the most vital of fitting steps!!!! The heel should always stay snugly in the heel cup of the skate.
8. The skater should be able to stand up completely straight, without any leaning in or out around the ankle area. If the ankles are buckling while standing, the skates do NOT have enough support.
9. If the skater can walk comfortably, supported through the ankle area, with the heels snugly in the heel cups and no toes touching the fronts of the skates, you have found a good fit!!!

## Caring for Skates

The most important part of caring for skates is ensuring that your blades are totally dry when finished on the ice, and that skates are aired/dried out once you are at home.

Skate guards should always be worn when skaters are anywhere but on the ice or on the rubber matting at the ice's entry. It is a good practice for skaters to walk on their toe picks even while on the rubber as little bits of dirt can collect there and jeopardize the blade's sharpening.

Blades need to be sharpened on a fairly regular basis, depending on how often they are used. To check if a blade needs sharpening, run your thumbnail over it lightly - if it doesn't create a bit of "nail dust", it needs to be sharpened. As well, if there are any nicks in the edges of the blades, they should be sharpened.

Once you are off the ice, dry your blades thoroughly with a cloth - a leather shammy/chamois is great for quickly and effectively drying blades, though any type of cloth will do if you take the time to absorb all the moisture.

NEVER put the skate guards back on the blades while transporting/storing your skates. Blade covers made of cotton/terry cloth are the best thing to place over dry blades when not on the ice. You can also put skates in two cloth bags, or even wrap them each in a towel before putting them into your skate bag. Whatever you choose, make sure your blades are dry and protected inside of your skate bag.

Skate covers can be worn to protect the outside of the skates as toe picks and blades can cause little cuts and nicks. They can also help to keep feet a bit warmer.

## Intermediate Skaters (Intro StarSkate and StarSkate)

All of the same fitting techniques listed above also apply to more advanced skaters. The main difference is that at this level, you may consider purchasing skates for which the boot and the blade are bought separately. In this case, you will be shopping at a specialty skate store and most likely attended to by an experienced sales associate. Nonetheless, you should be aware of the fitting points above in the off-chance you have someone helping you who is not a skate-fitting expert.

At this age, weight, and skating level, you do NOT need the most expensive/stiff boots available. Contrarily, you need boots at the introductory end of each figure skate maker's line of skates. Some of these options may come with the blade already attached, which is fine. There are many skate makers, and a skater's choice should always be the skates that fit the feet best, length and width-wise. Some of the popular skate makers include Don Jackson, Gam, GRAF, Riedell, Risport, and WIFA (the first three are Canadian companies).

If you choose a boot that doesn't come with a blade attached, you will need to buy a blade. At this level, recommended blades include: John Wilson's Majestic, MK's Club 2000, and Ultima's Mirage. The skate shop will mount the blades for you, however sometimes an adjustment is necessary after the skater tries them out. Your skating coach will be able to assist if this is the case.

If you have an opportunity to buy a used pair of skates, follow all of the fitting instructions above, and make sure there is still adequate ankle support and that the blade still has a slight curve to it and sharpening steel left on it. Skates can have adequate ankle support EVEN IF there are creases in the ankle. The skater should feel support and a bit of stiffness, and of course they should be able to stand up on them completely straight, without any leaning in or out at the ankles.

New boots at this level can be a bit uncomfortable until they are broken in. However, if a skater is experiencing ongoing discomfort, excessive or persistent blistering, consult your skating coach.

Leather skates should be sprayed with a leather protector before being used. The skate shop may have a special spray, but any outdoor-use leather footwear protecting spray is fine.