

## **Crocs: Are Crocs good for your feet?**

Boulder is a town known for its uniqueness. It is often associated with tree-hugging, sandal wearing hippies in tie-dye attire. Four decades ago Birkenstocks became popular for their comfort and feel just like Crocs are today. Now these trendy rubber like clogs have become a daily accessory for some people. Doctors and healthcare professionals agree Crocs are supportive but people are overusing them. They claim there are better things for your feet.

## **How the Buzz Started**

Created in 2002 Crocs shoes from Canada were originally intended as boating and outdoor footwear because of its non-slip tread and waterproof properties. Since the company's IPO last year, the clogs are now being worn by everyone from medical professionals to professional athletes in the 2007 AVP volleyball tour stated on its website. Also according to the company's website, the product is made of proprietary closed-cell resin named Croslite, which makes the product soft, comfortable, lightweight, odor-resistant and foot conforming. The company claims the Crocs RX line, also known as corrective Crocs, are ideal for people with foot problems—especially diabetics—from its wide inner support design that comes in three styles.

“The Crocs RX line of shoes has obtained certification and approval from the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA) which has given its seal of approval based on Croslite's ability to warm and soften with body heat, as well as the lightweight nature of the material,” Crocs PR Coordinator Claire Loker wrote in an e-mail.

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## **Crocs in the workplace: Are they being overused?**

Why are some doctors recommending the products to patients with foot problems when there hasn't been a medical journal endorsement or clinical trial for them? Crocs marketing have promoted the product as safe and corrective; therefore consumers are wearing them too much, and not for their intended use. Healthcare professionals are adamant there is no substitute for a custom orthotic (shoe insert).

“Shoe gear is pretty intrinsic for feet,” said Dr. Craig Thomajan, a podiatrist in Austin, Texas. “When you have foot pain it ruins your day,” he said. “It’s nice to have something that can relieve that.” When patients come to him they are beaten down, he said, and they’ve usually tried everything. As Crocs advocates, his medical staff wears them to work and his diabetic patients like Crocs RX because their feet don’t sweat and they are soft and comfortable.

There are differences between the two kinds of Crocs shoes. Crocs that you can buy anywhere, he said, are not the same design and material than Crocs RX but are both made from an injection mold process which gives it unique attributes. Overall Crocs RX has a better ergonomic design, a roomier forefoot but also supportive in the heel and arch, he said, is good for circulation and the whole body. “I’m a patient advocate first and foremost.”

Dr. Thomajan only recommends diabetic persons wear the shoes on occasion. “I don’t believe it’s an everyday, all day shoe. And that’s what we’re seeing,” he said. “It’s an

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after five shoe.” The type of shoe people should wear to other places and they work wonderfully around the house. He says the biggest problem he sees is that people do not realize they need to be in supportive shoes while on their feet all day long.

“Even the best made shoes without proper arch support will not help you unless you have an arch in it,” said Garth Ahner, D.C., a chiropractor in Colorado City. “If you’re feet are supportive, then you will have better supporting balance for your back.” Crocs does make all of these options, but they don’t take the place of prescription orthotics. “The whole combination is good for the back and feet.” Adding using Crocs products along with a shoe insert helps keep the body’s circulation in motion.

### **Foot Injuries Heed Caution**

They should not be used for injured feet. Those who have stress fractures and cracked heels are not recommended to use either style of Crocs to help their feet because they are not supportive enough for the body.

Laura Raile, a CU program assistant who fractured her left foot last December, said she loves wearing Crocs, but according to her doctor, “they’re too loosey goosey” and should not wear them after she gets the boot splint off. “They’re not good for the broken foot,” she said. The clogs do accommodate the height issue bringing her up to the boot’s level, and her podiatrist recommended supportive tennis shoes.

There are minor foot problems Crocs do well with though. Conditions like plantar

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fasciitis, tendonitis, arch pain and sprained ankles are mainly attributed to flip flops and sandals. Ahner said there is enough arch support in Crocs shoes to take pressure off that part of the foot, which are rarely issues from those wearing Crocs. Dr. Thomajan said cracked heels need support by a countered shoe so that the fat pad does not splay. While he believes the shoes offer good support and absorb shock well, there have been no studies to validate how much reduction in ground reaction forces.

Even though Crocs have been approved with the official seal from the American Podiatric Medicinal Association, this fact does not have all medical professionals' endorsements for them for all purposes.

A local certified pedorthist, Mary Weaver, who has 18 years experience, works with podiatrists and designs custom orthotics and shoes for people with foot problems. For diabetics specifically she recommends using Crocs lightly and not in place of an orthotic. "I wouldn't compare Crocs RX to a deep bed diabetic shoe," she said. "They're a house shoe." These shoes diabetics should only use at home to walk around the patio deck. She pointed out the toe-box ventilation/holes unique feature makes them dangerous, too; and they should not be used during outdoor activities like gardening because a rock could get caught in them as diabetics have limited feeling in their feet.

There were some qualities about this Crocs style she liked for soft tissue injuries—people with fungus or sores. It is a deeper shoe with room for an orthotic, she said, "They're not for everyone."

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“There is no way a single shoe is going to work for everyone’s foot,” said physical therapist Charlie Merrill, MSPT in Boulder who has never thought of them as a therapeutic shoe. Generally the people who have a structural problem, he said, need a very specific product or orthotic. There are situations where other groups of people without severe problems where Crocs work fine.

“People that really need intervention for their feet may not do well with a one size fits all approach,” he said. “I don’t think they serve any specific purpose for people except for their style or looks.”

### **Mixed messages**

In numerous personal surveys with Crocs consumers people agreed the reason for their purchase was not for aesthetic purposes, but because of comfort and functionality. Some people admitted they bought them for the fad, too.

Dr. Thomajan expressed the shoes have become popular because they’re fun and fashionable. “But they made a really good product. If you have a product that is good and it works, the fad becomes a part of the culture,” he said. “Imitation is form a flattery.”

CU Boulder student Camilla Ferenczi from New York City does not get what the craze is about. She said they’ve even become popular in her hometown. “New York is the capital of fashion and business and these ugly shoes should be banned from the City.”

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“Trends will always be around and that is the only reason they became popular.” They are not even that comfortable and Crocs knew how to market them, she said, to be the cool new in shoe, not for the great things they do for your feet.

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### **Sources List**

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