

the Fresh Meat File

All you need to know to get started in roller derby



1 Derby skates

How to choose a skate for starting out in Roller Derby. Before choosing your first roller derby skates, there are some questions you need to ask yourself:

- How likely is it that I will “pass” try-outs?
- How likely is it that I will continue to skate for fun and exercise, even if I don’t pass try-outs or if I later quit roller derby?
- How committed am I to roller derby?
- What is my skate budget right now?
- Do I want the best skates I can get now, or would I prefer decent skates for now and upgrade when I know my skating style and what I like in a skate?

Investment	Options
\$0 - \$150 Low budget Low commitment Low probability of using skates for other purposes	FREE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borrowing/Renting skates from a league member for try-outs.
	\$100 or less <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vintage skates with upgraded wheels. • Second-hand derby skates (more on this below).
	Around \$100 Entry level speed packages: R3, Rock, GT-40 etc. These will get you through your tryouts but will need to be upgraded if you make the cut. They generally come with low quality slippery wheels.
\$150 - \$200 Medium commitment Medium budget Medium likelihood of using skates for other purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entry level speed packages: R3, Rock, GT-40 etc. With upgrade to good derby wheels like the Flatoutrageous, Poison, Villain, Bullet, etc. • Rebel skates. These generally come standard with good wheels like the ones mentioned above. • If you weigh more than 200lbs, you should consider a skate with entry level aluminum plates (Triton, Competitor, Marathon...). They are heavier but will provide better durability and performance for heavier skaters.
\$250 - \$350 High commitment Medium budget High likelihood of using skates for other purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A quality leather speed boot like the Riedell 126 or Riedell 265’s. • Nylon plates. • Flatoutrageous, Poison, Villain, Bullet wheels etc.
	These tend to be fantastic skates that are really quite affordable. A good step up in fit and performance from the entry level boots. Nylon plates are affordable, light weight and durable. They do not, however, offer as high performance as good quality aluminum plates.
\$400 - \$450 High commitment Medium high budget High likelihood of using skates for other purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A quality leather speed boot like the Riedell 126 or Riedell 265’s. • A quality aluminum plate like the Rival. These plates are great value, responsive and reasonably light. • Flatoutrageous, Poison, Villain, Bullet wheels etc.
	These skates are perfect for people who know they are going to be serious about roller derby and want good skates now. Great boots, great plates no fuss. * At this price point be wary of skates that come with the following plates: Triton, Dynapro or Marathon. These plates are heavy and do not provide the level of performance that a plate like the Rival will.
\$450+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Custom Skates: custom sizes, custom colors, custom fit. • High End boots: Bont, Antik, Riedell 195, 595, 965, 1065 etc. • High End plates: Avenger, Reactor, Atlas, Roll Line etc. All fantastic products but a little above the budget and needs of most beginner derby skaters.



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Boots - Tall Boots VS Short Boots

Tall Boots	Short Boots
+ Tall boots are cute and classic.	+ The choice of most roller derby players in the US and Canada.
+ Have a higher heel, making it easier for beginner skaters to get their balance.	+ Low heel boots allow you to push harder using the full length of your legs.
+ Most tall boots available from RollerGirl.ca are made of supple material to allow for some freedom of movement.	+ Improved performance when compared to a high boot, especially with higher end products. Better energy transfer, better fit, better freedom of movement.
- Lower performance when compared to quality speed boots. High heel reduces push power and reduces maneuverability.	
- No room to upgrade: Higher quality tall boots are designed for artistic skating and are way too rigid for derby skating. The only appropriate tall boots for derby skating are entry level products.	

Short Boots options:

Cheap "Speed Packages" (Cheap but are they really?)

There are many cut-rate entry-level "speed" packages available online that sell for around \$100. They are a popular option for new derby skaters because they seem very affordable. These packages include: the R3, the GT-50, Viper, Rock skates, etc.

Bear in mind that NONE of these products are appropriate for roller derby unless they get an immediate wheel upgrade. The wheels that come standard on these packages are hard, slippery, low quality Chinese-made wheels. They are not good enough for roller derby. Upgrading to derby appropriate wheels will cost you upwards of \$60. These packages may not be as cheap as they first appear, but they are still a great option for new derby skaters or refs, so long as you upgrade the wheels.

Benefits of starting with an entry level package:

- If you don't stick it out in derby, you still have a decent pair of recreational skates and you aren't out too much money.
- They tend to be really comfortable right out of the box. They are made of vinyl not leather and do not require the normal "breaking in" that leather boots require.
- You buy yourself some time to do some research on higher end boots (and plates, etc.), try on other peoples' skates, and wait for the newest technology.
- You end up with a pair of skates that you can turn into your outdoor recreational skates when you upgrade.

Vinyl entry level boots like these will not stretch out as they break in. They need to be comfortable right out of the box. For this reason, you should aim at sizing a little bit larger than with speed skates. Derby is very hard on your skates. The expected lifespan of your boots is a maximum of about 3-4 years if you take good care of them. Entry level vinyl boots will only last you a season or so. Keep this in mind when you formulate your budget.

Professional Speed Boots

Most serious derby skaters will eventually upgrade to professional speed boots. Riedell makes a great line of speed boots: 126, 265, 495, 595, 965, 1065 etc. Speed boots are designed for performance and fit. They are light weight, allow better agility, better energy transfer and performance overall. It is extremely important to get speed boots that fit you properly. Unlike other types of boots, speed boots need to have a really snug fit in order to perform properly. They are usually made of high quality leather that will conform to the shape of your feet as you break them in, creating a snug slipper-like fit that reduces foot slippage inside your skates.



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Padding VS No Padding

You will notice that there are two types of “speed boots” on the market; those with padding and those without. One is not necessarily better than the other, it is simply a matter of personal preference:

No Padding

Traditional speed boots have no padding, they consist of a few layers of leather and/or man made materials. They are designed for optimal fit. You size them very tightly and as the skates break in, they stretch and conform to the shape of your feet, creating an amazing contoured fit. The breaking in process can be painful especially with boots made of more rigid material like the 495's, 595's or 695's.

Padding

Padded boots don't provide the same amazing fit as boots without padding but they tend to be more comfy from the start. They are often more rigid in general and provide more ankle support. The fit is more like a comfortable pair of running shoes. Examples of high quality padded boots are Riedell 965's and the Antik.

Sizing

The fit of your skates will make all the difference in terms of how much you enjoy your skating experience. The easiest and best thing you can do is try on your team-mates' skates, come in to our store, or speak to our friendly staff who will help you find the best fit using your foot's measurements.

In general, boots with padding have a more flexible range of fit than those without padding. Speed boots made of thin leather, with no padding, must fit as tightly as possible without causing pain. Extra space in your speed boots will greatly reduce their performance.

Most skate boots are sized in Men's sizes. In many cases for example, a Men's 6 fits as a Ladies 8, but for some skates a Men's 6 fits as a Ladies 7.5 or even an 8.5. Please feel free to call or email us to talk about skate sizing. Before wearing your skates to practice, make SURE the fit is good – if you have any questions at all on the fit, you can call us and we can help you do some sizing tests over the phone. RollerGirl.ca offers the best sizing guarantee in the industry. Please contact us for details.

Wheels

The world of skate wheels is a little complicated, and we won't go into it in too much detail, but here are a few rules you can use to help you navigate this rolling terrain.

Hardness (Also known as durometer): ranges from 78A - 103A.

- The smaller the number the softer the wheels (78A wheels are softer than 98A wheels)
- The softer the wheels the more grippy they are (78A-88A wheels are very grippy and used on slippery floors)
- Beginners do better on grippier wheels (in general) as grip means control.
- You must match the hardness of the wheels to the level of grip of the floor you skate on. If your floor is slippery you will need grippy soft wheels. If your floor is very grippy you will need hard slippery wheels.

Height (Also known as diameter): ranges from 54mm - 70mm

- The most popular wheels used for roller derby are either 59mm or 62mm tall. If you are a beginner stick to one of these sizes.
- Wheels bigger than 62mm are generally used for outdoor skating. Taller wheels are faster outdoors but are too unstable for derby skating.

Width (Also referred to as the profile of the wheels): ranges from 31mm - 44mm

- Beginner skaters should stick to either a 38mm or a 44mm wide wheel. We like putting most new skaters on 38mm because they are good balance of agility and stability.
- Small skaters, under 5'3", should stick to narrower wheels (38mm or less)
- In general the wider the wheel the more stable it is.
- In general the narrower the wheel the more agile it is.
- Anyone moving from and ice skating or inline skating background should avoid 44mm wheels.



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The right speed wheel for your needs depends on the surface that you are skating on, your body type and your style of skating.

Before choosing your wheels, ask yourself these questions:

- Are my practices always indoors?
- Am I a light weight skater (under 120lbs), or a heavyweight skater (over 200lbs)?
- Do I skate on a grippy or a slippery surface?
- What wheels do other skaters in the league ride?
- Do I want to work on my skating skills outdoors between practices ?

Indoor Wheels

If you will be skating indoors exclusively then you will need indoor wheels. Beginners should pick affordable, grippy wheels. Some great options are Flatoutrageous or Bullet wheels. Give us a shout and we'll be able to recommend a wheel for your skating surface, style, experience and body type.

Hybrid Wheels

If you will be skating indoors on a slippery surface and occasionally outdoors then you should consider getting hybrid wheels. These are wheels that can be used both indoors and outdoors. Indoors they are very grippy but a little bit slow. Outdoors they are slow and shakier than traditional outdoor wheels. The big benefit of hybrid wheels is that they are affordable and you can use them anywhere. They are a great first set of wheels while you save up for high end expensive indoor and outdoor wheels. Great hybrid wheels include the Poison, Villain and Envy.

Outdoor Wheels

If you plan on doing any serious outdoor skating (trails, transportation etc) then you should consider getting a separate set of high quality outdoor wheels. Good outdoor wheels are fast and can handle rough outdoor surfaces much better than hybrid or entry level outdoor wheels. The Radar Pure or Kryptonite Route wheels are great, but the best outdoor wheels on the market so far are the Atom Road Hogs.

Bearings

Bearings go inside your wheels and make your wheels roll. Each wheel takes two bearings – a pair of roller skates has 16 bearings.

ABEC Rating?

Some bearings are graded with an ABEC rating. For the most part the ABEC rating doesn't affect how fast bearings are - it's more important that you buy from a good manufacturer - but the ABEC rating does give some indication of the bearing's quality and level of precision used in the manufacturing process.

In general, higher ABEC rated bearings from one manufacturer will be better than lower ABEC rated bearings from that same manufacturer. In other words, if you buy Sure-Grip ABEC 1's they will be less smooth and have less "roll-out" than Sure-Grip ABEC 5's or 7's.

Quality & Brands

"Roll-out" is a term used to describe bearing performance (it is a relative term) – if a bearing has good "roll-out", it means that it'll allow you to roll farther with each strides. Good bearings feel faster and demand less effort to go the distance.

The generic Chinese bearings that sporting goods stores sell for inline skates are really inexpensive but they also tend to be of quite low quality.

Powell makes some of our favorite bearings. We find they last considerably longer than their competitors and they are reasonably affordable. China Bones REDS are popular bearings made by Powell, and they are fantastic! They are the most popular bearings used by derby skaters because they are so affordable, long lasting and smooth. We find them better than some of their competitors that are twice the price.



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Plates

There are a few categories of roller skate plates to consider for roller derby. Skaters that weigh over 200lbs should avoid nylon plates, they will not offer adequate performance or durability.

- **Nylon - Powerdyne Nylon, Probe, Sunlite etc... (\$30 - \$75)**

Lightweight, affordable, lower performance (not super responsive or maneuverable). A good option for beginner skaters on a budget who weigh less than 200lbs.

- **Low end aluminum - Super X, Jogger, Marathon II etc... (\$30 - \$75)**

Very heavy, lower performance, affordable. These are not ideal for roller derby as they are too heavy and not responsive enough. However they are a good choice for beginner skaters who weigh more than 200lbs and are on a restricted budget.

- **Medium end aluminum - Dynapro Aluminum, Triton, Competitor (Around \$100)**

Heavy, decent performance, and medium price. A good choice for beginner skaters who weigh more than 200lbs.

- **High End Aluminum - Rivals, Reactor, Revenge, Avengers, Roll-Line etc... (\$175-\$1000)**

Lighter weight than cheaper aluminum, terrific performance, more expensive but worth it if you have the money to spend. Great option for skaters of all body types and skill levels that have the budget.

Second-hand skates (what to look for, how to upgrade parts)

Your best bet for purchasing used skates for derby is to purchase them from a derby skater. Contact your local leagues and see if anyone is selling something in your size and will give you a good price. This way, you are likely to get a pair of skates that is actually good for derby, though you will probably pay more than you would for a pair at your local thrift store.

Almost all vintage skates, found on e-bay or at thrift stores, need to have their wheels and bearings upgraded before you can even try to use them for derby. Derby is played on a small track and a huge part of the game is about being agile and trying to stay in control at higher speeds. You MUST have good quality, wheels to play roller derby. Unfortunately wheels that are good for roller derby are not cheap. Expect to pay at the very least \$60 for new speed wheels, and \$25 for new bearings. Keep this in mind when pricing out second-hand skates.

Hints on buying used skates

Look for:

- Good brand names: Sure-Grip, Riedell, Bont, Atlas, Roll-Line, Atom, etc.
- Used speed boots: Riedell 265's, 125's, 695's, Antik, Bont etc.
- Entry level padded short boots like: R3, Boxer, Rock. These will be cheap but be aware that they will also likely need wheel upgrades.
- Good fit and comfort. Don't buy a pair of great boots that don't fit you perfectly, or you will be throwing your money away.

Avoid:

- The following brands: Chicago, Dominion, Pacer and Roller Derby.
- Running shoe style skates. This includes products like Skecher skates, Puma skates & the Jogger.
- High end artistic tall boots. Really terrific quality artistic tall boots are really bad for roller derby. The boots are simply too rigid to play derby in. If you want to play in tall boots look for soft supple leather or suede boots.
- Damaged or broken skates. Always carefully inspect used roller skates. Adjust the trucks, stoppers, wheel nuts etc. before you ride them. Replace any parts that are cracked, loose, broken or rusty.



Protective gear

Helmet

Choosing your Helmet: It's the liner that counts!

- **Soft Foam Skateboard Helmets (\$30-\$85)**

This type of helmet consists of a hard plastic shell and a squishy (often removable) liner. They are comfortable and affordable but do not offer as much protection as some of the other types of helmets on the market.

- **Dual Certified Skateboard Helmets (\$45-\$85)**

These helmets have a hard plastic shell, a thin hard foam (non-removable) liner and a very thin removable soft foam liner. Should claim CPSC and ASTM certification on box.

We think that these are the best and safest helmets for use for roller derby. They are certified for both big impacts (like bicycle helmets) and multiple small impacts. Ideal for derby.

It is best to try these helmets on if at all possible. Due to their hard foam liner they are a little harder to fit than the soft foam type.

- **Hockey Helmets (\$75 +)**

Most people who purchase a hockey helmet for derby do so in hopes of gaining extra protection for their brains. Be aware that many hockey helmets priced under \$100 have a soft foam liner and offer exactly the same level of protection as a soft foam skate helmet.

To get superior protection make sure you pick a hockey helmet with a hard foam liner. It should boast EPP foam liner on the packaging.

EPP foam hockey helmets offer great multi impact protection and are very adjustable but they do not pass the high impact testing that the dual certified helmets do. They are somewhere between soft foam and dual certified in terms of protection.

Please do not ever buy a second-hand bicycle helmet. They are made for single-impact use and it can be hard to tell if a helmet has been damaged in a crash.

Borrowing or buying a second-hand skate helmet/hockey helmet can be done at your own risk – make sure at the very least that there is no visible damage to the helmet.

Sizing your helmet:

Your helmet should fit snugly but not painfully. It should sit low on your forehead near your eyebrows and should not slip around. Make sure to adjust the chin strap too, see helmet box for instructions on strap adjustment.

All helmet brands fit slightly differently. If you are unsure of your sizing send us an email and we can help you make the best choice.

Knee pads

Choosing your Knee Pads:

It is our opinion that special attention needs to be paid when selecting knee pads for roller derby. You fall on your knees all the time in roller derby, sometimes intentionally other times unexpectedly and often with a lot of force.

The cheap recreational-grade kneepads used for inline skating are NOT sufficient for roller derby.

Our advice is to get the best, cushiest pads you can afford and learn to skate with them from the very beginning. You will greatly extend your derby career and minimize the chances of knee injury (one of the most common injuries we see, besides bruises and fishnet burns).



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Triple 8 Park and 187 Fly knee pads offer sufficient protection for roller derby – but ONLY sufficient protection. These pads are perfect for: fresh meat who are just starting, girls on a budget, refs, and very tiny girls. If you are not one of these people (and even if you are), please consider better knee pads like the Scabs, 187 Pro or the Triple 8 PRO.

Elbow Pads

Choosing your Elbow Pads:

Elbow pads must fit well. The amount of padding they offer is secondary to fit. It is unlikely that you will fall on your elbows very often, but if you do, they need to stay in place to cushion the impact. We recommend the Triple 8 or 187 brand elbow pads. Recreational-grade elbow pads (i.e. Rollerblade brand) can probably get you through fresh meat training, but we highly recommend something with a bit more padding that fits properly.

Sizing your Knee and Elbow Pads:

Each brand of knee/elbow pads fits differently, so just because you know your size in one brand do not assume it applies in other brands. A good fitting pad is tight but not painful. Be aware that pads will stretch out as they break in so it is good if they feel a little too tight when they are new. Contact us if you are unsure on sizing.

Wrist Guards

Choosing your Wrist Guards:

Wrist guards take a lot of abuse in roller derby – we fall on them, clap with them, wipe sweat off our cheeks, grab onto them when we receive "whips", etc. We like the 187 and Triple 8 wrist guards best. Always look for wrist guards that have plastic inserts on the top and bottom of the hand for extra protection and which fit snugly and comfortably (as comfortable as wrist guards can be). If you want extra protection you can consider upgrading to Triple 8 RD wrist guards.

Sizing your Wrist Guards:

Wrist guards fit pretty standard:

Small: Small hands

Medium: Average hands (fits most people)

Large: Quite large hands

Please note that wrist guards that slide on like the RD or Hired Hands tend to fit smaller. You may need to go up a size from your sizing in other wrist guards.

Mouthguard

These are your main choices with mouthguards:

Cheapie mouthguards (\$2 - \$6)

- Boil and bite, with a limited mail-in warranty which insures you for some dental expenses if something terrible should happen while you're wearing it.
- Offers sufficient protection for starting out and/or light blocking drills.
- MAKE SURE YOU MAIL-IN YOUR WARRANTY! You are not automatically covered with these ones.
- These make it difficult to talk while wearing them and may make you gag a little.
- They make great "spare" mouthguards because they are cheap – keep one in your skate bag just in case.



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Gel mouthguards (\$20) – i.e. Shock Doctor gel max.

- You are automatically insured when you wear one of these, up to a limited amount.
- They are boil and bite, but have a bit more to them than the cheapie mouthguards. We like `em!
- They are big, can be hard to talk in and may make you gag a little.

Fitted sport guards (\$50+)– the ones your dentist makes.

- The most comfortable, best looking (and most expensive) option.
- You can get these made in lots of nice colours!
- There is NO dental warranty associated with these – if you break your teeth while wearing one, you are responsible for all of your tooth-fixing costs!

Protech Dent mouthguards (\$25)

- Reasonably priced.
- Really slim fitting and easy to talk in.
- Not terribly durable, they last about 3-6 months.
- You are automatically insured when you wear one of these, up to a limited amount.

Protective Gear Maintenance

Take good care of your protective gear – clean it and get it stitched up or taped up if it gets ripped.

Some tips on keeping things fresh:

- Between washings, air your gear and skates out thoroughly.
- Don't leave your gear bag in your trunk between practices!
- Clean your mouthguard with a tooth brush and toothpaste, spray it with mouthguard disinfectant or use a mouthguard cleaning case.
- Stick dryer sheets in your gear bag.
- Keep a box of baking soda in your trunk.
- Spritz your gear with commercial anti-bacterial spray, or diluted vodka (½ cheap vodka, ½ water), anytime you have 24 hours between skate sessions.

Do your washing once a month at least, or anytime it gets dank. Here are two options:

The Gentle Way

- Hand-wash your gear in the bathtub with mild detergent, warm water and some baking soda.
- Rinse and repeat.
- Lay your gear outside (not in direct sunlight) to dry for 24 hours.

The Fast and Easy Way (but it breaks your gear down faster)

- Put your gear in a pillowcase, tie it up, and throw it in the washing machine with a mild detergent and cold or warm (not hot) water.
- Lay it flat outside to dry. Do NOT put your gear in the dryer as the heat can deform and weaken the fibers and the plastic caps.

Even with the best care, protective gear is not immortal. Here are some general life expectancies:

Wrist guards: Expect to replace these between 6 months and a year. The plastic bracing starts to wear through, the fabric exterior starts to wear through and after a while, even a good wash doesn't de-stink them.

Elbow pads: Depending on how hard you use them and how well you care for them, elbow pads can last between 1 and 2 years.

Knee pads: Replace your knee pads after 6 months to a year. The elastic will stretch out and the padding will compress. If you start to get bruises under your knee pads, it's a sign that the padding has compressed.



Fitness for roller derby

Derby can help you get in shape, but it is also a good idea to build your fitness base for roller derby. Here are some ideas to start with:

Cardiovascular Endurance:

- Include aerobic exercise 3-5 days a week, for 20-60 minutes.
- For awesome results, and to bring your endurance up FAST, try high intensity intervals of 20 seconds to 2 minutes (the duration of a full-length jam), followed by 10 seconds to 3 minutes of recovery.

Strength Training:

Lots of floor exercises for legs and abs can be done with your skates on for an extra challenge (to add weight)!

Look these up online for help with form & technique:

- Squats (wall squats, plié squats, one-footed squats, squats on skates).
- Lunges.
- Leg presses.
- Toe presses (calf raises).
- Toe pulls (very good for preventing shin splints!).
- Core work, as much as you can (make sure you offset ab work with back work).
- Don't neglect your upper body either, for balance.

Stretching:

Do it every day if you can, and definitely take one day a week off of training to recover, or more if you're just starting. Also, of course, take any injuries or medical conditions into account and ask your doctor if you have any concerns.



Choosing your derby name

This is your superhero name! What do you want your fans to be chanting from the stands?!? What do you want to use to make clever slogans on your panties? How are you going to inspire fear in your opponents or confidence from your team-mates? A derivative of your own name might be a good place to start for some ideas. Before you settle on a name, try on a bunch of different ones first: you're gonna be stuck with whatever you decide on! Here are some ideas for brainstorming:

Creating a "persona". Pick a quality about you that you'd like to emphasize:

- Physical: hair colour, height, flexible, cute, strong, etc.
- Emotional: angry, loving, scary, modest, moody, earthy.
- Other: i.e. nationality, hobbies, music, etc.

Pick a quality that you want to have:

- Speed, agility, sexiness, bravery, poise, strong hits, etc.

Association

Think of words that are associated with the qualities mentioned above, or completely different words that you like and which sound good like amazonian, terror, brunette, etc. or random cool objects and adjectives like turquoise, whisky, alpine, sparkles, panther, mango, lipstick, Tokyo, etc.

Mix it up

Combine all your cool words in as many interesting ways as you can, and try them all on. Any good puns or plays on words? Anything that sounds like a famous name?

Final Considerations Lastly, consider the following:

What will you be called for short? How will your derby name interact with your derby # and position? Your audience (i.e. are you cool with your five year old brother cheering for "Chesty McPanty-less"?)

Pick a name that inspires you (and isn't already taken: <http://www.twoevils.org/rollergirls/>)

Be yourself, play under your real name! You don't need to pick a name at all if you would rather play under your real name. As the sport of roller derby grows and progresses many athletes are choosing to forego the derby name and proudly wear their own names on their jerseys.