

How To Buy A Football Helmet

Today's football helmets offer superior protection for the head and come in a variety of sizes and with different padding systems. It is important to know the different components when purchasing a football helmet.

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Types of Helmets

Youth

- Youth models are obviously designed to fit a smaller player's head
- Additionally, these typically use a different type of plastic, such as *ABS*, which is plenty durable but less expensive than tougher plastics used in adult helmets

Adult

- Adult helmets generally use a *Lexan Polycarbonate shell*, a very resilient material

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Helmet Components

Air Systems

- Helmet manufacturers offer models with an air system liner
- This is designed to return the air system to its original state after a collision much more rapidly than foams or straps
- Air systems withstand repeated blows better than helmets that use just foam pads
- In addition, air systems are generally more comfortable and provide for an easy fit since air can be adjusted to tighten the helmet to your head's specific shape

Padding

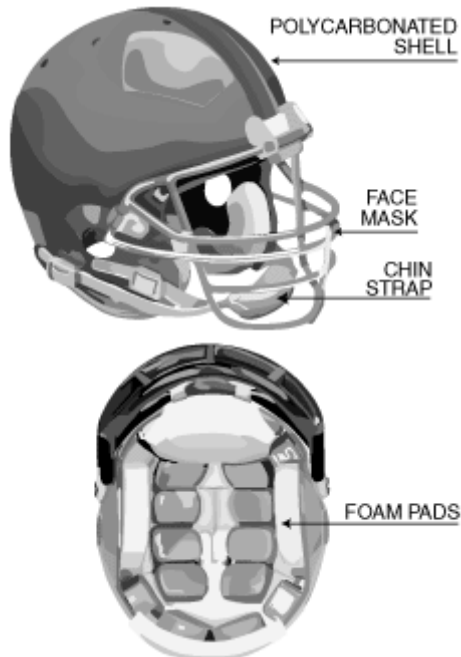
- Helmets come with a series of pads, usually foam, that further cushion the head, jaw and nose
- These pads usually come standard with any helmet that you buy
- Replacement pads, liner padding systems and liners also are offered
- Pads may be designed specifically for your helmet model
- Pads include front and back sizes to adjust the helmet's fit
- Pads for the top, side and back of the helmet and jaw pads also are part of the padding system
- Manufacturers offer these pads in different thickness, ranging from 1/2 to 1 inch, to allow you to select the firmness that you prefer

NOCSAE

- NOCSAE stands for the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment, a voluntary organization that has developed standards for a variety of sports protective equipment
- Any helmet that bears the NOCSAE seal shows the manufacturer has met the standards at the time the helmet was manufactured

Chin Straps

- Chin straps perform two functions
- First, they protect the chin area, with a cup that fits snugly underneath and around the chin
- Second, the straps snap onto your helmet to hold it firmly on your head. That's why it's crucial to keep it centered and without slack.
- Helmets come with standard chinstraps, but you can buy different styles and replacement straps



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Face Masks

- Helmets come in two basic ways: with and without the mask
- There is an array of face masks offered, each designed to protect various parts of the face and to optimize protection for different players while still allowing them the best visibility to play their position
- Manufacturers often use letters to designate a facemask's designed protection
 - OPO--Oral Protection Only
 - JOP--Jaw and Oral Protection
 - NOPO--Nose and Oral Protection Only
 - NJOP--Nose, Jaw and Oral Protection
 - EGOP--Eye Glass and Oral Protection
- In order to protect the carbon steel that is generally used in facemasks, manufacturers may offer different coatings, with a premium paid for more durable coatings

Styles

There are many styles of facemasks as well to help you maximize needed protection while still being able to play your position. These differences are usually indicated by an abbreviation:

- R: Reinforced
 - Refers to the reinforced bar at the top of the facemask

- This strengthens the facemask and minimizes the chance of vertical spreading
- DW: Double Wire Configuration
 - This adds stability and strength
 - It also decreases the opening in the facemask so hands, fingers and feet are less likely to strike your face
 - This design minimizes the chance of *horizontal spreading*, important for linemen or for other positions where you either block or tackle and end up in the pile
- SW: Single Wire Configuration
 - This eliminates a bar running in the "east-west" direction
 - This design will suit you if you play a position where visibility is critical
- UB: U-Bar Attached
 - This often times is called a bull ring
 - As with a Double Wire design, the U-Bar also is designed to minimize fingers, hands or feet from striking your nose
- SK: Skill Position Players
 - Designed for skill position players since the side bar is angled back for better peripheral vision
 - It's also slightly longer

Sizes

- Sizes typically run youth, regular and extra-large to correspond to each manufacturer's sizing system
- Youth model face masks should fit all sizes of youth helmets
- Regular size face masks should fit small, medium and larger shell sizes of adult/varsity helmet models
- X-large face masks fit the same size shell as regular size face masks and can also be used on large sizes when a player may need the extra protection

Safety Warning

- DO NOT USE FACE MASKS/HELMET SYSTEMS TO BUTT, RAM OR SPEAR AN OPPOSING PLAYER. THIS IS IN VIOLATION OF THE FOOTBALL RULES AND CAN RESULT IN SEVERE HEAD, BRAIN, OR NECK INJURY, PARALYSIS OR DEATH TO YOU, AND POSSIBLE INJURY TO YOUR OPPONENT. THERE IS THE RISK THAT THESE INJURIES MAY ALSO OCCUR AS A RESULT OF ACCIDENTAL CONTACT WITHOUT INTENT TO BUTT, RAM OR SPEAR. NO FACE MASK/HELMET SYSTEM CAN PREVENT ALL SUCH INJURIES.

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Determining Your Helmet Size

- Have someone help measure you with a measuring tape or *head caliper* at 1" above the eyebrows to determine the size of your head
- This then will correspond to the various sizes offered in helmet models
- Helmet manufacturers strongly suggest you maintain a moderate to short hairstyle during the season. Severe changes in hair length often require a new fit.
- Dampen your hair to approximate sweat conditions; towel off excess water
- The front of the helmet should sit 1" above your eyebrow. This is the point at which the head was measured and is the point at which you can encompass the largest percentage of head mass.
- When pressing downward with the fingers interlocked on the top of the helmet, the pressure should be on the crown of the head and not on the brow
- The chinstrap should be exactly centered and without slack to anchor your helmet properly
- Keeping in mind that not all manufacturers size the same, you can use the chart below to determine your general helmet size

Determining Your Helmet Size			
General Rule for Ritting Helmets			
Adult		Youth	
Helmet size	Head/Hat size	Helmet size	Head/Hat size
Small	6 1/8 - 6 3/4	X-Small	6 3/8 - 6 5/8
Medium	6 1/2 - 7	Small	6 5/8 - 6 7/8

Large	7 - 7 1/2	Medium	6 7/8 - 7 1/8
X-Large	7 1/4 - 7 1/2	Large	7 1/8 - 7 3/8
XX-Large	7 1/2 - 7 3/4	X-Large	7 3/8 - 7 1/2