

How To Buy A Softball Bat

No matter the softball league you play in, buying a bat is a personal decision. New technology has delivered bats that not only enhance performance but also are tailored to an individual player's strengths. It is essential that you select a bat that fits your unique body configuration and skill level--height, weight, and hitting strength.

Understanding Bat Materials

The world of bats now offers a large variety of choices in materials. These can be broken into two primary categories--*aluminum* and *Graphite/Titanium lined*. Virtually no softball bats are made of wood any longer. Each provides its own unique characteristics.

Aluminum

This has been a player favorite for several years now Aluminum bats provide a lighter weight for increased control and bat speed

Aluminum and the other metals also offer durability. Despite generally higher costs, players can save money since the bats are extremely difficult to crack or break

Aluminum bats come in a variety of alloys, each with a different weight. Generally, lighter aluminum alloys are thinner and more durable. These lighter weights also increase the "sweet spot," the hitting zone on the bat's barrel that gives the maximum place to put metal to ball.

Aluminum bats, and those enhanced with other alloys, also come in single-layer or double-layer construction

Double-layer bats offer more durability and power, since the ball rebounds off the bat with more authority

Graphite/Titanium lined

Technology has enabled bat makers to use lighter, stronger materials. Graphite and titanium are just two of these.

Both are usually added to thinner-wall aluminum bats, enabling bats to be lighter and increasing a player's swing speed

These materials also increase durability and the batter's sweet spot

Graphite and titanium also help reduce vibration and the sting of ball shock, the tingling feeling sent to the hands usually when you miss hitting the ball in the bat's sweet spot

Determine What Bat Fits Your Body

There are some standard rules of thumb in selecting the appropriate bat length. The charts below offer some guidelines based on age and weight and height:

Age

Using your age as a guide, use the chart below to determine the bat length that fits your body.

Determine Your Bat Length by Age	
Age	Bat length
5-7 years old	24"-26"
8-9 years old	26"-28"
10 years old	28"-29"
11-12 years old	30"-31"
13-14 years old	31"-32"
15-16 years old	32"-33"
17+ years old	34"

Height and weight

Height and weight are usually better ways to determine what bat length may work best for you

Once again, use the height and weight chart to give you a general idea of the length of bat that fits your body

Determine Your Bat Length by Weight and Height										
	Your height (inches)									
	36-40	41-44	45-48	49-52	53-56	57-60	61-64	65-68	69-72	73+
Your weight (pounds)	Bat length									
less than 60	26"	27"	28"	29"	29"					
61-70	27"	27"	28"	29"	30"	30"				
71-80		28"	28"	29"	30"	30"	31"			
81-90		28"	29"	29"	30"	30"	31"	32"		
91-100		28"	29"	30"	30"	31"	31"	32"		
101-110		29"	29"	30"	30"	31"	31"	32"		
111-120		29"	29"	30"	30"	31"	31"	32"		
121-130		29"	29"	30"	30"	31"	32"	33"	33"	
131-140		29"	30"	30"	31"	31"	32"	33"	33"	
141-150			30"	30"	31"	31"	32"	33"	33"	
151-160			30"	31"	31"	32"	32"	33"	33"	33"
161-170				31"	31"	32"	32"	33"	33"	34"
171-180						32"	33"	33"	34"	34"
180+							33"	33"	34"	34"

Determining the Right Bat Weight

Most bats are weighted in ounces

Manufacturers have done a great job in balancing the bat's weight to its length

Many bats have a weight-to-length ratio, often shown as -4, -6, etc.

This basically means a 34-inch bat with a -6 ratio weighs 28 ounces

Selecting weight really depends on two critical factors--your strength and your hitting style

It also depends a lot on your personal preference in weight and length, so the following are simply guidelines to follow:

Bigger, stronger players prefer a heavier bat since they get the benefits of both the heft and swing power

Smaller players with less strength should consider a lighter bat to generate a quicker swing

Younger players, too, should consider that a lighter bat increases control, great for singles hitters, while also reducing the risk of injury

Understanding Bat Technology

Bat technology may seem a little confusing but it's not rocket-science. There are three essential elements to a bat: *barrel size*, *bat taper* and *grip*.

Barrel size

This includes both the length of the barrel--top part of the bat--and its diameter

The longer the barrel, generally, the larger the sweet spot for hitting the ball

The standard softball bat diameter is 2 1/2 inches

Fast pitch softball barrel standard is 2 3/4 inches

Many players prefer a smaller barrel that lightens weight and provides more swing speed

Bat taper

This is the diameter of the bat's handle

Standard bats are tapered $\frac{31}{32}$ of an inch but can be slightly larger or smaller depending on whether you want a lighter or heavier bat

Some players like a narrower taper for the lighter weight and to rotate their wrists faster when hitting

Grip

The grip is simply the covering that bat manufacturers use on the handle of aluminum bats

Leather or synthetic leather gives a tackier feel for a surer grip

Rubber grips absorb more of the shock

Some bats come with a cushioned grip to decrease the shock even more