

The Most Important Advice

As with any type of new activity for the body, go gradually to allow the feet and legs to adapt.

Remember that while muscles, tendons, and nerves adapt relatively quickly, skin will adapt more slowly and bones and ligaments more slowly still. Also bear in mind that recovery from injury may proceed at a different pace - while nerves may adapt quickly, they recover from injury slowly.

Minimalist Footwear

You can spend \$100s of dollars on so-called minimalist footwear. There are lots of ideas on the Web. Good luck.

Or you can pop down the Warehouse for slip on beach booties or beach slippers retailing Summer of 2010 at around \$11.00 a pair for adult sizes. They have minimal cushioning - even less if you remove the thin insole, wear well for walking at least, and provide good protection for the skin while conveying almost all of the shape of the ground and allowing the internal structure of the foot to react to differential pressure just as if you were barefoot.. They are ideal for situations where you want the feel of being barefoot but want to keep your feet covered.

Or make your own moccasins.

Surfaces for Going Barefoot

The ideal surfaces is uneven in a slight but random fashion and also somewhat giving.

Try grassy areas, the verge rather than the foot-path, parks, playing fields and reserves, beaches, bark or woodchip trails, riverbeds, weathered rock at beaches, old cobblestones

Sources and Resources

Books:

A most useful book on the science is:

The Human Foot: a Companion to Clinical Studies by Leslie Klenerman and Bernard A. Wood, pub. Birkhauser, 2006, ISBN # 9781852339258

At present you can access an electronic copy on one of the two open terminals at the OU Medical Library. There is a physical copy in the Auckland University Library and, if you are feeling rich you could purchase online at around \$US100 plus p&p.

On running practice try:

The Barefoot Running Book by Jason Robilliard see: <http://www.tbfrb.com/>

Online Resources:

What can I say—go to town with Google or your favourite search engine, just don't be sucked in by extremeists, of whatever camp, and hawkers.

The following will give a flavour:

<http://www.runblogger.com/2010/05/barefoot-minimalist-running-debate-plea.html>

<http://www.runningandrampling.com/2009/08/wonderfully-made.html>

<http://www.eorthopod.com/content/foot-anatomy>
<http://trainingclinic.vivobarefoot.com/running-the-skill/>

<http://howtorunbarefoot.com/> (Caution: zealots)

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*Something positive for
your feet, your joints
(and your wallet):
Join the barefoot
drevolution!*

Introduction to Barefoot Walking and Running Workshop



September 24, 2011

Dunedin North Intermediate School

by

Peter McDonald B.Phys. Ed (Otago)

The Debate: My Position

Debate rages on many internet sites between proponents of barefoot running and believers in the value of shoes and orthotics. A lot of it on both sides is garbage ideology based on taking extremist positions in order to promote goods or services.

I advocate routine (daily or 3-4 times/ week) periods of barefoot or minimalist shoe walking or running on unsmooth giving surfaces. I believe it is healthy for healthy feet and properly managed, healing for some, I would like to say many, unhealthy feet. Free reflexology for the feet and the body.

There is a growing barefoot running movement around the world. I believe that this is a good thing BUT remain convinced that running long distances on flat hard surfaces is on balance unhealthy, whether shod or barefoot. It is a legitimate area for self-challenge and competition but don't kid yourself about the health benefits - altho you may choose to do it for the performance challenge and for competition.

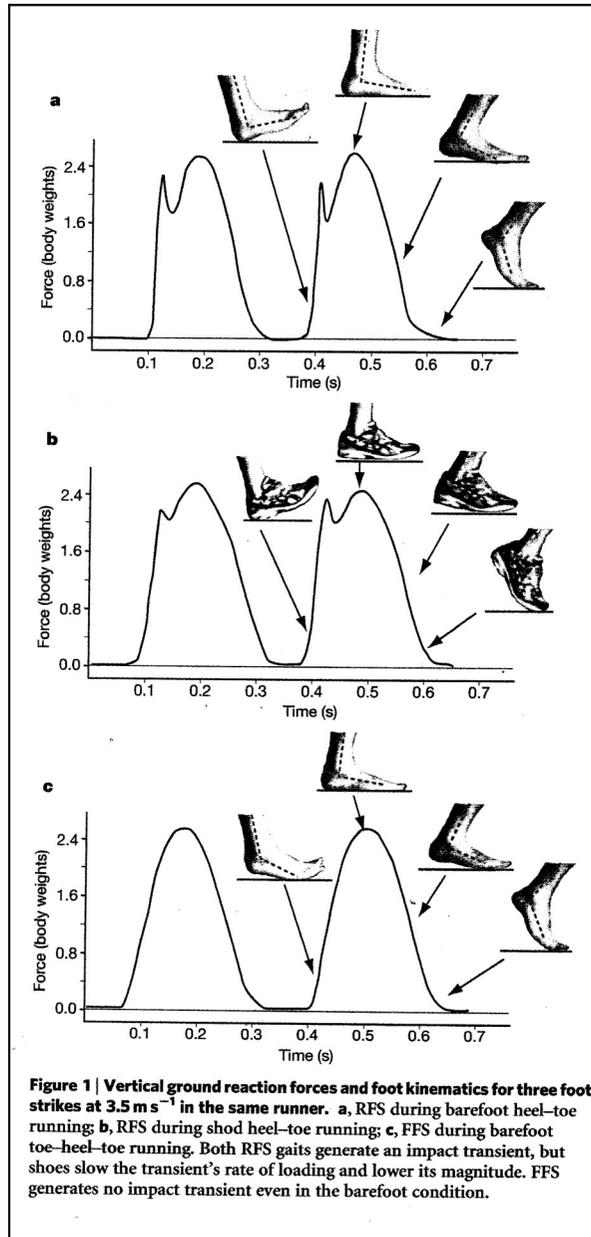
if you do have or suspect you have existing foot problems then I would urge you to consult your doctor, physio or podiatrist about proceeding with barefoot walking or running on a regular basis - but don't let them off too easily - according to the clinical perspective, freedom from pain denotes a healthy foot - we I hope are aiming higher.

Why Go Barefoot? - I

Our foot structure - with its many bones, joints, muscles, nerve connections and sensors is marvelously adapted to convey information on uneven ground surfaces very quickly to the muscles controlling the lower and upper leg - and more slowly to the central nervous system to absorb pressure and guide our balance as we move about in daily life.

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Comparison of Footstrike Forces



From: Foot strike patterns and collision forces in habitually barefoot versus shod runners by Daniel E. Lieberman et al,

Why Go Barefoot? - 2

... Walking or running on flat hard surfaces in shoes both muffles and renders redundant most of the motor and sensory abilities of the feet. Further, repetitive stress and poorly fitting shoes may damage the feet. If all of our walking and running is of this type the feet are being exercised only over a very limited range.

Going barefoot over uneven giving surfaces gives the feet exercise that brings into play all of the abilities of the structure and the muscles, sensors and nerve connections of the feet.

Use it or lose it applies here as elsewhere. While children and young people often go barefoot, older adults may need to pay more conscious attention to getting barefoot exercise to improve foot health.

How to Go Barefoot?

To walk barefoot in the same way that we walk in shoes is quite uncomfortable. The diagrams on the left show you why.

Walking or running barefoot or in minimal shoes involves a change in gait from heel first to mid or fore-foot first. It is almost as though the front of the foot reaches to touch the ground very slightly ahead of the heel. That is the first point and will involve a shorter stride.

The second point is to have the joints of the leg and foot in or close to alignment so the foot (and the knee) point in the direction you are going. If your normal gait is splay-footed, make change slowly.

For walking this gait will feel strange and less effective for a while so it is important to relax and not to hurry.

For running, it is very uncomfortable to heel strike without the support of shoes so mid- or fore- foot strike quickly feels more appropriate when running barefoot.