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Within the last couple of years barefoot running has become more and more popular. Barefoot running is just as it sounds: running without shoes on. Many people are partaking in this activity because of the benefits that it's supposed to have.

Running barefoot has been going on for centuries. Back in the day shoes were not widely used, and if they were they consisted of very little padding and support. Those that are proponents of barefoot running claim that the human body has evolved over thousands of years to run without shoes. Because of this, humans run most efficiently and with the proper technique when barefoot. When running barefoot, the strike of the foot usually lands at the forefront and then works its way to the heel while using muscles to ease the force. When using modern shoes the strike of each step is concentrated onto the heel which puts a lot of stress onto both the muscles and bones.

Runners are turning to barefoot running to try to avoid injuries that they've been battling for years. Barefoot running is beneficial because the foot and lower leg were made to absorb the shock of landing on the forefront of the foot and turn it into forward motion. Running with shoes however forces a person to land on their heel, which prevents the foot and lower leg from being able to absorb the shock. This results in the shock being transferred up the leg to the knees and the hips. As can be expected, a lot of people get injuries because of this.

There have been many successful barefoot runners. Many run barefoot simply because of their culture. In 1960 Adebek Bikila of Ethiopia won the Olympic Marathon in Rome while running barefoot. He stated that he ran barefoot because the team issued shoes hurt his feet. Zola Budd won the IAAF World Cross Country Championships in 1985 and 1986 while running and training barefoot. She also competed in the 1984 Olympic games in L.A. barefoot. There are many other professional runners that have also competed barefoot.

In 2009 Christopher McDougall's book *Born to Run* was published and really made barefoot running into a phenomenon. His book talks about the reasons behind barefoot running and some of the benefits of it. Since his book there has been a great interest in barefoot running. In fact in 2009 the Barefoot Runners Society was founded, and has continued to grow over the years.

Due to this interest in barefoot running many shoe manufacturers are now coming out with new shoes that simulate running barefoot. The most popular of which is Vibram Five Fingers. These shoes have thin rubber bottoms to protect your feet from harmful objects like sticks, glass, and rocks. They also are like toe socks in that they have a place for each toe. This company's sole purpose is to provide shoes that simulate barefoot activity. Personally, I have heard nothing but good things about them. Some other shoe manufacturers that are making barefoot style shoes are New Balance, Nike, and Saucony. New Balance came out with their Minimus collection which is very similar to FiveFingers in that it has very little cushioning. Saucony's Kinvara line has a dropped sole to try to prevent heel striking. Nike's free line has a segment sole which allows the foot to move freely but still maintains its cushioning. Of these products Vibram FiveFingers is the closest to running barefoot. It simply provides protection with its rubber bottom.

There are many people, however, that still feel that running barefoot is not a good idea. These people feel that there is not enough evidence to support the claim that running barefoot prevents injuries and that shoes cause injuries. In some respects they are right. There is not very much research out there that's concentrated on the benefits of running barefoot. And there are people who run barefoot and still get injured. Some people are just more prone to injuries than others. I

think that in the next few years though there will be a lot more research on the subject, especially considering the rate of popularity that the concept is growing.

People that are against barefoot running also claim that though humans may have evolved to run barefoot, they definitely didn't evolve to run barefoot on concrete. Though this is true, the main aspect of running barefoot is the way that the foot strikes. It's better to strike at the forefront than at the heel. If this logic stands, then running in shoes would be even worse on concrete because the body is absorbing an even larger shock right on the heel, which barefoot runners claim is very bad for the body.

It is hard to determine which method is the correct one with very little research out there. In the next few years I'm hoping that a lot of research will be done. As for right now I would say that the best method is trial and error. If you're not having any problems with regular shoes then you don't necessarily have to try running barefoot, but some of the benefits are better foot and lower leg strength, improved efficiency and an overall better feel while running. Even if you're not having chronic injuries, trying barefoot running could result in some of these benefits. If you don't notice any differences then you don't have to continue running barefoot, but why not try something that's so easy? As for runners that do have chronic injuries, trying barefoot running is a good idea. If it doesn't work, then it's not for you, but at least you tried.

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