



Is Barefoot Better?

By: Dr. Emily Splichal

You don't have to be in the fashion industry to notice the recent shift in shoe trends. Everywhere you look competing brands are putting out their version of a shoe that will get you in shape "no gym needed"! From MBTs to Sketchers Shapers and Nike Frees to Five Fingers®, shoes are promising to ease the impact of walking, activate the core and improve posture. But what if we took away all the cushioning and fancy soles? What if you were to workout barefoot?

With the foot being the interface between the ground and the rest of body, what if we focused on building human movement from a strong foundation – the foot?

So, again I ask, *is barefoot better?*

- The skin on the bottom of our feet play an important role in balance and upright stance, and has been shown to be more sensitive than ankle joint proprioceptors and muscle response.
- The strength of our toes gripping the ground keeps us balanced and stable. Studies have shown that aging individuals with the strongest toe strength were the most stable and had the least number of falls.
- Barefoot sports report the lowest number of ankle sprains and foot/ankle injuries when compared to shod athletes.
- Humans have evolved to run with slightly different foot biomechanics than walking. Before the mid 1970s, all humans ran either barefoot or with minimal support footwear such as sandals, moccasins or thin running flats.

Not ready to join the barefoot running trend? You can still train barefoot and strengthen your feet by incorporating barefoot balance training into your fitness program.

For more information on barefoot balance training visit www.evidencebasedfitnessacademy.com

For more information on barefoot running visit www.barefootrunning.fas.harvard.edu

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