

THE OHIOHEALTH SPORTS MEDICINE INSTITUTE

Recommendations for Barefoot Running

There is still a lot we don't know about barefoot running. Until more evidence-based research is available, we cannot recommend for or against minimalist and barefoot running techniques.

Studies suggest ground reaction forces are less with barefoot running than with shoe running. However, decreased ground reaction force does not necessarily decrease the risk of injury. Barefoot running, more specifically barefoot training, improves the strength of the foot muscles. Research is inconclusive as to specific recommendations for barefoot running/barefoot training.

Your gait changes with barefoot running from a heel strike to a forefoot strike. If you barefoot run, concentrate on changing your gait to a forefoot or midfoot strike to prevent injury. Running barefoot with a heel strike can increase the risk of injury.

Barefoot running does increase the risk of cuts, abrasions, lacerations and puncture wounds to the foot. Be sure to consider your running surface. Barefoot running should ideally be done on a softer surface such as a track, grass or sand. Surface should be free from debris.

Our Recommendation...

Barefoot training should be used as a cross-training tool.

If you intend on starting a transition, consider barefoot training prior to progressing to barefoot running.

- + Include strength training exercises using your body weight, resistance bands, or light dumbbells barefoot.
- + Go barefoot while you warm up and perform stretches, and/or dynamic warm-up drills like high knees, butt kickers, etc.
- + Add barefoot exercises like Yoga and Pilates to your training program.
- + Go barefoot for balance training exercises.

When transitioning...

- + Start slowly and gradually increase barefoot running.
- + Start by walking around barefoot to get used to the changes in gait and muscles used.
- + Begin with no more than 1 barefoot run per week.
- + Start with an easy 1/4 mile run or less for first barefoot run.
- + Gradually increase length of the run by 1/4 mile per run.
- + Stick to the 10% rule.

Consult your local running shoe store. Finding the right shoe and the right fit for you can make all the difference. Consider a lighter weight or minimalist shoe before barefoot running to protect your foot from abrasions/lacerations.



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