

Thinking About Barefoot Running? Read This First!

Dr. Tina A. Boucher, DPM

There has been quite a bit of talking lately in the running world about running without shoes, or barefoot. Those who run barefoot are choosing hard surfaces, like pavement, over softer surfaces like sand or grass. Our ancestors ran barefoot for many years without anything covering their feet. Today, runners are choosing barefoot running to relieve chronic injuries they incur over time.

When we run with shoes, our shoes force us to land on our heel instead of the ball of our foot, which is the natural way to run and land. The arch of our foot and our lower leg cannot fully absorb the shock the way the ball of our foot can. The shock then instead travels up our heel, through our legs and to our hips. It is possibly a reason why so many runners get shin splints, heel pain, and other problems because of the way we land in shoes. It is important to note however, that this has not been proven by any modern research.

Barefoot running uses our natural way of moving to propel ourselves off the ground and then again when we land. When you push off the ground with the ball of your feet you will land with your feet directly under your hips, as they should be.

When beginning any new exercise regime, you should always check with your physician first. Barefoot running may not be for everyone, especially those use to wearing thick-soled running sneakers. Those types of shoes are much more forgiving when running over glass, ice, and sharp objects. It will take those who have been “heel strikers” much longer to adjust to this type of running, “forefoot or midfoot striking”.