

RUNNING SHORTS

Running in your bare feet

Running barefoot can be a comfortable change of pace

By Ken Johnson

Most of us who wear expensive running shoes with gel cushioning cringe at the thought of running barefoot. We have worn running shoes for so long that running barefoot seems unnatural. The opposite is actually true. Humans walked and ran in their bare feet for thousands of years before shoes were invented. Cushioned running shoes did not appear until the 1970's.

While running shoes protect the feet from hazards on the running surface, i.e. rocks, glass and thorns, they cause the runner to strike the running surface with their heel first. This causes a more forceful impact and can result in stress injuries.

Barefoot runners tend to strike the running surface with the balls of their feet or middle of their feet. This significantly reduces the impact of the strike and is a more natural motion. Runners who have been running barefoot over a long period of time report that it is comfortable, even on hard surfaces and gravel. Calluses develop over a period of time and help protect the feet from debris on the running surface.

"Barefoot running shoes" (also referred to as "minimalist footwear") are relatively new on the scene. These shoes fit the foot like gloves fit the hand, to include individual toe pockets. Generally, the bottom is made of leather or rubber. They provide most of the advantages of barefoot running and at the same time, provide the feet with some protection against debris.

Obviously, if you have never run barefoot, it will take a while to adjust. You will be using different muscles and developing calluses on the bottom of your feet for protection against debris. If you start barefoot running, start with short distances and build up gradually.

On the other hand, some of us have run in cushioned running shoes for so long that we will continue to do so. At some point, injuries may force us to reconsider.

Melissa Stelter, a student at Sam Houston State University, started running barefoot several months ago. She reported an immediate improvement in her running gait and posture. She is gradually increasing her distance and is now up to four miles.

There is much information on the Internet on barefoot running. Check it out; barefoot running may be for you.

Recent race results:

Spring Fling 5K (3.1 miles), Huntsville, April 24

Jacob Gautreaux, 37	21:33
Justin Bickford, 23	25:15
Stephanie Maldonado, 23	25:32
Annie Brickell, 20	25:47
Chase Parker, 15	26:07
Steve Bickford, 49	26:09
Jerry Flanagan, 70	29:56

Darin Pacher, 41	31:57
Don Ortloff, 64	33:40
Ken Johnson, 68	33:59
Robert Funk, 40	34:54
Juan Hernandez, 54	37:24
Skipper Nethery, 61	38:52
Sophia Legerski, 9	43:29
Emily Dawson, 8	44:08
Sarah Dawson, 9	44:22
Jacki Dawson, 37	44:25
Gabrielle Legerski, 5	44:47
Kirstie Legerski, 40	44:58

Stampede for Need 5K, College Station, April 24

Robert Duncan, 50 19:13 (2nd overall)

Texas Roundup 10K (6.2 miles), Austin, April 24

Darryl Shreves, 49	58:36
Lavonne Zaiontz, 42	1:08:00
Anna Shreves, 50	1:17:33

Great Strides Run, 3.3 miles, College Station, May 1

Robert Duncan, 50	22:01
Ken Johnson, 68	34:30

Flying Pig Marathon (26.2 miles), Cincinnati, OH, May 2

John Cook, 54 5:35:00

Upcoming Huntsville Races:

May 31 – Memorial Day 5K & 1-Mile Run/Walk, Timberwilde Sub-division.

June 12 – June Bug 5K & 1-Mile Run/Walk, Health & Kinesiology Center, SHSU campus.

For more information about these and other races in the area, visit the Seven Hills Running Club web site at <http://www.7hills.us> and click on Race Schedule.