

## RUNNING SHORTS

### What's new in running shoes?

By Ken Johnson

If you were a runner back in the 1960's, you probably ran in tennis shoes. Running shoes as we know them today did not appear until the 1970's. Over the years, running shoes have become heavily cushioned with motion control features with the goal of reducing impact forces and pronation. Heels are raised to accommodate heavy gel pads or pockets of air. Different models were designed for pronators (runners who have an inward roll of the foot when striking the ground) and supinators (outward roll). There are also neutral models. Every company producing running shoes have touted the benefits of their various shoe models.

Wearing typical running shoes, runners tend to strike the ground first with their heel. Some have suggested that this heel strike can result in numerous injuries, including plantar fasciitis (inflammation of the thick connective tissue on the sole of your foot).

In an earlier column, I reported on the growing popularity of barefoot running. Barefoot runners tend to strike the ground with their forefoot or mid-foot. This significantly reduces the impact of the strike and is a more natural motion.

Now, the shoe industry is rushing to produce "minimalist running shoes."

Characteristics of minimalist running shoes: light weight; small heel to toe drop, less support; minimal upper; wide toe box; flexible; and, a low sole. Basically, running in minimalist running shoes is like running barefooted, except that the shoes provide protection of the feet against running surface.

The ultimate minimalist running shoe is often referred to as the "toe shoe." This shoe fits the foot like gloves fit the hand, to include individual toe pockets. The bottom is usually made of leather or rubber. Erin Weidner, Shoe Manager at Luke's Locker in The Woodlands, says that toe shoes are so popular that they cannot keep them on the shelves.

Minimalist running shoes are now available for trail running and for transitioning from regular running shoes to minimalist shoes.

Weider at Luke's Locker is quick to point out that minimalist running shoes can be an effective training tool, but should not be a substitute for regular cushioned running shoes. The jury is still out on the safety of heel strikes vs. forefoot/mid-foot strikes. She also advises that if someone wants to try minimalist shoes, they should be cautious and use them gradually.

All running shoe stores will be glad to assist you in selecting the right shoe for you, based on your running gait and the distance and surface you run on.

If you have had injuries or particular problems in the past, recommend that you visit with your podiatrist to help determine what is the best running shoe for you.

#### Recent race results:

#### **Blues Capital of Texas 5K (3.1 miles), Navasota, Aug. 13**

Robert Duncan, 51 19:55 (3rd place overall)

Russell Jenkins, 39 22:05 (1st in age group)

Ken Johnson, 70 36:36 (2nd in age group)

**Run the Woodlands, 5K, The Woodlands, Aug. 13**

Jacob Gautreaux, 38 18:07

Steve Bickford, 50 24:39

**Sunday Night 5K, The Woodlands, Aug. 7**

Ken Johnson, 70 36:16

**Upcoming races in Huntsville:**

Aug. 20 - **Heat Wave 5K and 1-Mile Run/Walk**, 8 a.m., Veterans Memorial Parkway

Sept. 24 – **Fall Fun Run, 10K,5K and 1-Mile Run/Walk**, Veterans Memorial Parkway

Oct. 8 – **Speak up for kids CASA 5K**, Bowers Stadium parking lot

Oct. 22 – **Huntsville Half Marathon & 5K Run/Walk**, HKC, SHSU campus

Oct. 29 – **The Great Muddy Escape, 5K**, General Sam’s Offroad Park

Nov. 5 – **Rocky Raccoon 50K, 25K, 10K Trail Run**, Huntsville State Park

For more information about this race and others, visit the Seven Hills Running Club web site at <http://www.7hills.us> and click on Race Schedule.