



Why I run barefoot

Hannah Ehlert, 37, attended a barefoot running course (naturalrunning.co.uk)

"I did the course because I always liked going barefoot and wanted to learn to enjoy running more. I'm not a sporty runner – I just like it, especially first thing in the morning. I remember my first run after the course, when everything just clicked; I got what it was all about. It's been a real challenge to my mind, too. I'm more aware now when I run. If I see a piece of glass, I

slow down and run around it – our brains are not stupid. That said; I have had tiny glass splinters before. Barefoot running is a healthy challenge for my brain and my whole body. It's like playtime for my feet. I look at different surfaces – like well-trodden smooth ground or a puddle – and think, 'yummy, that would feel nice.'"

"Running becomes less serious when it's barefoot," says Toombs. "Contrary to popular belief, the streets of London aren't filled with dog poo and glass. You don't get shredded soles. My feet have even changed shape – they're more toned."

But, resist the romantic notion to ditch your shoes and run regardless, warn experts; shod feet just aren't up to the job at first. They need weeks, if not months of strengthening. If you can't walk a mile barefoot without feeling pain, don't try running yet.

new techniques

There are several methods of learning; the Pose method – arguably the most "scientific"; Chi Running and the Alexander technique. "Good posture and rhythm are essential," says

Saxby. Where most runners will struggle, he says, is cutting back on distance initially. Don't mix running shoes and going barefoot; it confuses your muscle memory and slows your learning, he adds. Initially your calves and Achilles tendons may suffer, so stretch these after each run. Joggers classically bend at the hip with head bent forwards. "In the natural world, there's no such thing as jogging," says Saxby. "You either run or you walk."

Instead, aim to pivot on your ankles with your feet landing lightly under you, taking shorter strides with your body aligned. And stick with it. "Initially your brain doesn't like you going barefoot. Our feet are so sensory; suddenly you're getting all this information. You have to acclimatise."

The Kit...

1 Evo from VivoBarefoot £100, terraplana.com
Featuring a 4mm puncture-resistant sole and TPU cage for ultra-light breathability, this is a great minimalist design.

2 Kigo Star £45.00, lovethoseshoes.com
Weighing just 5oz, these have a removeable insole and eco-friendly uppers.

3 Vibram Five Fingers Sprint £98.99, lovethoseshoes.com
Made of stretch polyamide for comfort and speedy drying, these fit low to the foot.

