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## **Barefoot or Minimalist Shoe Running**

The national bestseller book, *Born to Run*, written by Christopher McDougall, has sparked an interest in the return to basic running either barefoot or in minimalist shoes. This craze can be seen if you pick up any runners' magazine and while we rarely see people running barefoot around Jacksonville on our roads, many runners, both competitive, cross country high school runners, as well as recreational runners are seen participating in local races in minimalist running shoes.

Part of the reason for this is each year, almost 40% of runners will sustain some type of injury which will keep them out of running for a period of time. Many of these injuries have to do with training errors, running too far too soon or too fast, but a lot of them have to do with the rigorous demands of the sport. Running shoes have evolved greatly over the past 30 years where as back in the 1970s only the true runners were running in shoes which amounted to today's minimalist shoes. The running shoe industry has made great advances in cushioning, support and technology over this period of time and we now have running shoes capable of absorbing a lot of shock. Consequentially, some of our running styles have evolved into an over-stride heel strike which transmits shock and forces up through the body causing injuries both to the heel, the plantar fascia, the shins, or the knees. Barefoot or minimalist shoe running involves lighter foot reactive forces as you are landing on your forefoot or with your foot flat and then quickly lifting off with a much lighter running style.

Some of the world's greatest runners from Kenya and the Tarahumara Indians from the mountains of Mexico spend much of their time barefoot or wearing very minimal footwear and consequently have been able to perform and run great distances in very minimal shoes. Unfortunately, Americans have grown up in very supportive shoes from day one, ladies are often in heels or kids are in fancy cross trainers and our working men and women in work boots, cowboy boots and our business executives in shoes with heels. Our culture has caused our feet to be lazy and consequently if one is not careful, a rapid transition to barefoot or minimalist running can cause many problems.

While some limited barefoot running on the beach or grass surfaces, such as golf courses, can certainly help build up strength in the foot, one must temper our enthusiasm to avoid serious injuries. If you are a runner and are interested in improving your running, many of the stores in Jacksonville have classes to teach better running form and the biomechanics as well as analyze your gait. Some of the newer shoes and minimal shoes can help you run more efficiently, pound less, and avoid transmitting the shock from a hard heel strike up to the rest of your body.

None of us would probably attempt to play golf without lessons and there are definitely ways to improve one's running and help you enjoy exercise in sport in a safe and efficient manner.