

Running & Hiking

When a barefoot Abebe Bikila of Ethiopia won the marathon at the 1960 Olympics and barefoot runner Zola Budd set records in the 1980s, the world saw how functional bare feet can be.

American Ken Saxton has inspired many to investigate the benefits of barefoot running. Saxton has finished more than 50 marathons running barefoot. www.runningbarefoot.org

The number of barefoot runners keeps growing. Brett Williams, right, ran the 2006 Salt Lake City marathon sans shoes. The Wall Street Journal and others took note of his feat, and ABC News aired a barefoot running feature that year.



Photo by Kristyan Williams

Barefoot Hiking: When did you last feel a cool carpet of grass beneath your feet, soft dirt between your toes or a refreshing woodland stream underfoot? Barefoot hikers appreciate the sensory “vistas” of ground textures and temperatures in addition to the visual vistas of forests, hills and plains that other hikers enjoy.

Before Richard Frazine’s 1993 book “The Barefoot Hiker,” many who enjoyed barefoot hiking did not realize they had so much company. As Frazine notes, “*Going barefoot in the forest is a very sensuous and pleasurable experience. For some of us, it is an almost mystical experience.*”

Outdoor activities suitable for bare feet also include volleyball, disc golf, Frisbee, playing catch and other backyard and beach endeavors.

Indoor activities routinely conducted in bare feet include martial arts, yoga, gymnastics and modern dance.

“The human foot is a masterpiece of engineering and a work of art.”

— Leonardo da Vinci

Barefoot-like Designs

Some shoe manufacturers have begun to recognize the benefits of nature’s original design and have even developed footwear to simulate the biomechanical advantages of walking barefoot. Of course, for those who prefer the real thing, nothing surpasses going barefoot.

- **Nike Free:** A training shoe that simulates barefoot running, created after observing the Stanford track & field team train in bare feet.
- **Swiss Masai Barefoot Technology:** This shoe style provides less support and stabilization, requiring the foot muscles to work during the act of walking. As a result, the feet become stronger and more developed.
- **Soleless (bottomless) sandals:** Available in bejeweled or simple hemp and leather designs, this “footwear” is designed for those who wish to remain barefoot while still decorating their feet and giving the appearance of wearing some sort of shoe.



Soleless sandals

“What spirit is so empty and blind, that it cannot grasp the fact that a human foot is more noble than the shoe and human skin more beautiful than the garment with which it is clothed?” — Michelangelo

Would you like to join the Society For Barefoot Living?

www.barefooters.org has a link for joining. Membership is free and includes email correspondence with others around the world who also prefer going barefoot.

Love Going Barefoot?

So do we!

Society for Barefoot Living



Barefooters: People from all walks of life who simply prefer to go barefoot.

Why barefoot living? Barefooters value its comfort, health benefits

and sensory pleasures. They appreciate the freedom to choose healthy feet over the problems and discomforts that often result from over-reliance on shoes.

Foot Facts:

- Going barefoot offers many health benefits. It promotes general foot health and strengthens muscles in feet and legs.
 - Many types of footwear can cause harm to overall foot health.
 - Going barefoot is legal. Health codes do not require footwear for customers in stores, restaurants or other businesses.
 - Driving barefoot is legal and often safer.
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To learn more, visit our website:
www.barefooters.org

Comfort & Freedom

Remember how good it felt to go barefoot when you were a child?

Do you kick off your shoes at home to feel more comfortable and relaxed?

Do your holiday and vacation dreams include walks over sandy beaches, grassy parks and natural trails well-suited for bare feet?

What if no one else cared about what you wore on your feet as you played in the yard, walked the dog or even ventured out to go shopping? Would you go barefoot more often?

That wonderful spirit of barefoot freedom still lives in many of us, but how often do we choose to follow it? We likely have more freedom to go barefoot than we may assume.

Why render our feet deaf and blind? Imagine wearing gloves and ear plugs every time you left the house. Think of all the wonderful sensory input you would miss. Now imagine expanding your sensory input and enjoying the wide variety of interesting textures and pleasant surfaces right beneath your own two feet as you go about your day. You can!

“Going barefoot is the gentlest way of walking and can symbolize a way of living—being authentic, vulnerable, sensitive to our surroundings. It’s the feeling of enjoying warm sand beneath our toes, or carefully making our way over sharp rocks in the darkness. It’s a way of living that has the lightest impact, removing the barrier between us and nature.” — From “Barefoot Dreaming” by Adele Coombs



Barefoot graduate

“And forget not that the Earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair.” — Kahlil Gibran

Health Benefits

Going barefoot can improve general foot health. It allows normal foot development and promotes strengthening of the musculature in the legs and feet. A study published in the September 2006 journal *Arthritis and Rheumatism* suggests that walking barefoot may reduce susceptibility to osteoarthritis.

<http://arthritis.about.com/b/a/257404.htm>

Athlete’s foot: Going barefoot actually reduces the opportunity for athlete’s foot to take hold. Athlete’s foot is caused by a fungus which thrives in warm, moist, and dark environments. Shoes provide just such an environment. Thus, the problem is not the foot-to-floor contact but the foot then entering a dark, warm shoe which functions as a fungus incubator. Those who frequently go barefoot rarely contract athlete’s foot.



Photo by Kristyan Williams

Children and bare feet: In the 1961 classic “Take Off Your Shoes and Walk,” author Dr. Simon Wikler writes that children who regularly go barefoot develop stronger, healthier and more functional feet.

The website below offers extensive helpful resources for parents, including the perspectives of doctors, testimonials from parents, historical information, barefoot activities for kids and the findings of noted orthopedics expert Dr. Lynn Staheli, who observed that children raised in parts of the world where shoes are not often worn have greater flexibility, mobility and foot strength. www.unshod.org/pfbc/index.html

Barefoot paths have grown in popularity around the world. Designed for bare feet, they offer a variety of surfaces and textures over which to walk and climb. The tactile stimulation underfoot is considered beneficial for the body, mind and spirit.

One example: www.barfusspark.info/en/park.htm

“Healthy feet can hear the very heart of Mother Earth.” — Sitting Bull

Barefoot in Public

Health codes, the law and bare feet: Have you ever seen one of these unwelcoming signs at a store or restaurant entrance: “No Bare Feet” or “No Shirt, No Shoes, No Service”?



Many people assume that health codes, insurance or the law require these policies. Not so. Almost without exception, state and county health codes and other laws in the U.S. do

not regulate the footwear of customers in establishments. Insurance policies do not mandate customer footwear, and OSHA requirements apply only to employees.

See: www.barefooters.org/health-dept

Stores may set their own policies for attire, but no compelling health concern requires footwear for customers. It is bare hands, not feet, that pose and encounter health risks as they come in contact with doorknobs, food, mouths, other people, etc. Feet generally touch only the surfaces on which they walk.

Driving: Many assume that the law prohibits driving barefoot. Again, not so. As some law enforcement agencies note, drivers can have better pedal control with bare feet than with many common styles of footwear.

Assumptions about going barefoot in public being unsafe, unsanitary or illegal are largely based on misinformation or a lack of experience. Yes, going barefoot can involve some minimal risk, just as living life involves risk. Barefooters accept these potential risks to gain greater benefits, and barefooted people pose no more of a threat to shoe-wearers than bareheaded people pose to hat-wearers.

www.barefooters.org/key-works/case_for
<http://dictionary.laborlawtalk.com/barefoot>

“People do better when they’re free, and the foot does better when it’s free.”

— Dr. Lynn Staheli