

Personal Health newsletter

PRACTICAL INFORMATION FOR A HEALTHFUL LIFESTYLE

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*Helping
you make
your own
decisions
about your
personal
health . . .*



Barefoot running; is it for you?

The jury is still out on the benefits of running barefooted or wearing the new style of minimalist running shoes (such as footwear that has “fingers” for the toes).

Our understanding of human biomechanics is constantly evolving and we are learning much about footwear for active people. We do know footwear protects the feet from cuts and abrasions and offers the shock absorbency we no longer have on many running surfaces (concrete, etc.). Footwear can also offer support to the feet and ankles.

However, barefoot running advocates say footwear limits the natural motion of each joint during the regular gait cycle and can increase the incidence of problems to the knees, ankles, hips and back. Since footwear was designed by humans, this certainly is believable. Wearing shoes has trained us to use mostly the larger muscles of the legs, leaving several smaller muscles much weaker. However, more research is needed to determine if barefoot running really does prevent injuries.

If you are thinking of becoming a barefoot runner, be aware you may be at an increased risk of injury until your unused muscles accustom to *not* running in shoes. Stretching and strengthening exercises should be followed along with a gradual transition into using your new minimalist shoes or going barefoot.

Barefoot runners should also consider the terrain – you’ll have to be sure your running sur-

face is free of sharp objects and be cautious of bacteria on the surfaces of floors and exercise mats in the gym. If you decide to continue running on hard unnatural surfaces, blisters, calluses and skin abrasions will be a concern. The friction on hard surfaces is much greater against your bare skin than it would be on grass or dirt.

Diabetics have decreased sensation in their feet and should avoid barefoot running, as they may not be aware of an injury.

Barefoot running is also a popular spiritual practice. Many believe our modern lifestyle (wearing shoes, walking on and being surrounded by concrete) interferes with our connection to the subtle but ever-present energy of the earth. In his book *Earthing*, Martin Zucker says the flow of the earth’s electric energy through the physical body has been scientifically proven to promote healing and create a deep sense of well-being. Going barefoot is one technique for “grounding” us to this healing energy.

Progress slowly to using minimalist shoes or running barefoot. Start by walking barefoot, alternated with short runs. Gradually lengthen the running while decreasing the time walking. Your feet have been bound for many years in running shoes. The weakened muscles deep in your feet, along with changed biomechanics, could take months to adapt.

(See more about footwear choices for active people on the back page of this issue).

Carbing up for your sport

If you're competing in an athletic event, your endurance can be affected by the food you eat. A high carbohydrate diet can make a difference in physical performance.

Carbohydrate-rich foods are foods that we grow: grains, vegetables, and fruit. Your body turns carbohydrates (carbs) into glucose, a simple carbohydrate circulating in your bloodstream. The glucose is used immediately or stored in the muscles and liver. Glucose stored in the muscles becomes glycogen – a storage form of glucose. When the body needs energy, glycogen is converted back to glucose. With more glycogen stored, you can last longer during physical exertion.

Traditionally, carbohydrate loading for an athlete involved manipulating the diet. A high protein diet, low in carbs was followed by a high carb diet just before competing. However, recent studies find it's more effective to manipulate exercise instead. The following recommendations are suitable for all athletic competitions, including bodybuilding.

Maintain a year-round high carb diet. About sixty percent of daily calories should be carbohydrates. Get 5 to 7 grams of carbs per kilogram of bodyweight daily. To carb up for your event, keep eating a high carbohydrate diet but do the following: (1) Three days prior to your event, cut back your training to only 20 minutes. This maintains just a small turnover of glucose into the muscles. (2) Two days before, again train for 20 minutes only. (3) On the day before competing, get complete rest. It's hard for most athletes to take a day off. However, complete physical inactivity is necessary. If you don't rest your muscles before the event, you'll continue using stored glycogen, depleting your glycogen stores. You won't have the stored fuel for running, sprinting, etc., and in bodybuilding the muscles won't look as "pumped."

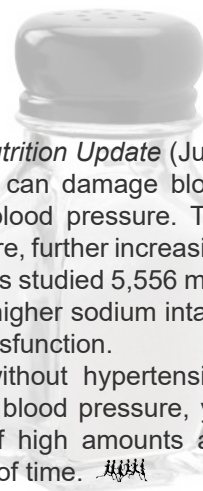
The next day (on the day of your event or competition) your muscles will be adequately fuelled.

Even if you aren't competing, stay carbed-up year round. You'll keep your body full of energy so you can continue training hard.

Excess salt damages blood vessels

A study, reported in *Tufts Health & Nutrition Update* (June 29, 2012) found diets high in salt can damage blood vessels, as well as eventually raise blood pressure. The damage raises blood pressure even more, further increasing the risk of heart disease. US researchers studied 5,556 men and women and found a link between higher sodium intake and two biomarkers for blood-vessel dysfunction.

Previous studies of people without hypertension found little short-term effect of salt on blood pressure, yet salt is associated with hypertension if high amounts are consumed regularly over a long period of time.



HEALTH TIP

Grape Juice may boost brain power

University of Cincinnati researchers found drinking Concord grape juice significantly improved memory.

Twenty-one volunteers, average age 76, suffering mild cognitive impairment were given either the purple grape juice or another liquid. The amount of juice varied with the participants weight: for example, a 120-pound volunteer drank 12 ounces daily while a 200-pound person received 21 ounces.

After 16 weeks, the grape-juice drinkers scored better on memory tests than those drinking the placebo. MRI tests revealed greater activation in key parts of the brain, which suggests increased blood flow.

This supports 2006 research at Tufts University, showing Concord grape juice, which is high in polyphenol compounds, reversed brain aging in rats.

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Helpful herbs & plants

If you occasionally have problems falling asleep, consider using the herb valerian (*valeriana officinalis*). It's a natural sleep aid used primarily for anxiety and insomnia. The herb is widely used in Germany, Belgium, France, Switzerland, and Italy as a sleep aid.

Did you know . . .

- An extremely low fat diet inhibits the body's ability to fight infection.
- Cigarette smoking and drinking too much alcohol or caffeine can all interfere with the body's ability to absorb calcium. Stop, or be prudent with their use.
- You don't have to exercise intensely to achieve health benefits. Light to moderate activity is also beneficial!
- Standing burns 12 calories more per hour than sitting.
- Regular exercisers sleep about an hour longer than non-exercisers and fall asleep more quickly.
- Even just ten minutes of exercise per day will significantly improve your health.
- Chestnuts are the only nuts that are low in fat. Half a cup provides only 1.6 grams of fat, compared to about 32 grams found in most nuts.
- Two small kiwi fruits provide more potassium than a banana, just as much fiber as a grapefruit, and twice the vitamin C of an orange.
- If you are suffering with a cold sore, try changing your toothbrush. The virus could be surviving on your brush, and re-infecting you.

Adverse effects of valerian are rare: headache, dizziness, or digestive discomfort. However, we can all react differently to any herb, so be cautious. Avoid combining with alcohol and medications. Pregnant and lactating women and those with liver disease should avoid the herb. And long-term use is *never* recommended. Occasional use is best. The biggest drawback to valerian is its slightly unpleasant odor.

The valerian plant is a tall, leafy perennial that bears clusters of white and pink fragrant flowers. The root contains the "healing" properties used in the herbal preparations. The herb can be taken as a tea, herbal capsules, tinctures, or extracts.

Valerian is also used by herbalists to treat digestive difficulties, nausea, urinary problems and to generate menstruation. In Europe, it became popular by the 18th century as a treatment for nervous disorders.

Today, valerian is one of several herbs recommended for mild sleep disorders. But if you have severe problems sleeping, see your doctor.

For more information about sleep disorders, contact Sleep/Wake Disorders Canada, 1-800-387-9253 or visit www.swdc.cijb.net



Laughter

It's great to have grey hair. Ask anyone who's bald. *Rodney Dangerfield*

You have to participate in a marriage. That was news to me. *Roseanne*

I burned sixty calories. That should take care of a peanut I had in 1962. *Rita Rudner*

Fitness - If it came in a bottle, everybody would have a great body. *Cher*

I saw a notice which said 'Drink Canada Dry' and I've just started. *Brendan Behan*

Shoes made for walking . . .

Walk much? If you're an avid walker, pay close attention to your footwear. The proper shoes prevent blisters and calluses, support the feet, and adequately absorb impact from hard surfaces.

But blisters and shock absorption aren't the only protection a good pair of walking shoes should provide. The right shoes can correct any foot alignment problems, to further lower your injury risk.

If you're not stepping right, it's like building a poor foundation for a house. If your foot isn't aligned properly with the rest of your body, that can throw unnecessary stress on areas like the knees, hips, or lower back.

When shopping for walking shoes comfort is important. It may also be wise to shop where professional fitters can take a good look at the way you walk. Bringing your old shoes may be helpful too, as the wear patterns will assist in foot analysis. A knowledgeable person can check for things like pronation, arches of the feet, and for past or present foot injuries.

How a person moves is just as important as just looking at the shape of the foot. That's why it's not always accurate to use the "foot-print" analysis – where you dip your foot in water and make an imprint on a piece of cardboard. This may be a good way to determine things like arch type, etc, but it's not an accurate indication of how the foot moves during the activity.

There really isn't one shoe appropriate for every foot. Running shoes may even be a better choice for some walkers, owing to their more flexible design and shock absorption capabilities. Some walkers prefer the breathable mesh construction of running shoes, as opposed to the solid leather of walking shoes. However, certain foot types may need a walking shoe's "stiffer" shoe construction for better stability.

If you buy shoes without the help of professional fitters, here are some tips when you're on your own:

- Take along or wear the socks you'll wear when walking.
- Put on both shoes and walk around the store to try them out.
- If you feel your toes pressing along the top or the

side of the shoes, try a larger or wider size. There should be at least a half-inch between your longest toe and the end of the shoe.

- Women with very wide feet may consider men's or boys shoes, which are larger through the heel and ball of the foot.
- Know your arches. Be sure your shoe gives the right support in this area. If not, you may need to use inserts.

Shoes won't last forever, especially if you're an avid walker. Even if your shoes still feel comfortable, over time their shock absorption or support may have deteriorated. Pay attention to signs of wear on the soles of the shoes.

In addition, feet widen and flatten with age and the fat padding on the sole of the foot can wear down. Foot problems may impair balance and function in older people. So don't drag your feet about checking your shoes often and replacing them when necessary.



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