**Bare feet and Balance**

**Cognitive impairment and dementia**

The ability to stand and walk is not just a simple, automatic motor function driven by your limbs and muscles, but rather a complex task that requires cognitive input. As such, declining mental and cognitive function can increase the risk for balance issues and falls because of impairments in attention, reaction time, decision making, detection of postural issues, and short-term memory. Yoga and tai chi can be helpful in preserving balance in people with dementia and cognitive impairment.

SOURCE: Harvard Medical School (<https://www.health.harvard.edu/exercise-and-fitness/better-balance-simple-exercises-to-improve-stability-and-prevent-falls#app>)

**Barefoot Training Might Be The Latest Fitness Fad But Its Benefits Are Legit**

Here's what you could gain if you lose your shoes.

BY EMILY ABBATEPUBLISHED: MAY 13, 2019

* Barefoot training isn't new, but it's recently become buzzy again thanks to Instagram.
* Below experts explain what's to be gained by working out without shoes.

It’s easy to not think twice about kicking off your shoes the second you walk inside after a long day or when jogging down a sandy beach. But what about when it comes to hitting the gym? Enter the latest Instagram-friendly fad, likely somewhere in your feed at this very moment: working out indoors without your sneakers on—somewhere other than your yoga mat, Pilates reformer, or ballet bar.

The trend toward barefoot training is gaining traction among fit pros everywhere, and not just because they’re too lazy to lace up (been there, felt that). Working out sans shoes can actually help improve balance and overall foot and ankle strength, says Lacee Lazoff, a kettlebell specialist and StrongFirst-certified trainer in New York City.

On the list of muscle groups you're looking to target, your feet likely come in far behind toned arms or strong legs, tbh. But according to Dr. Anne Holland Johnson, foot and ankle surgeon at the Hospital for Special Surgery in NYC, strengthening this area should be a priorty.

“Your feet and ankles together are the base of the body,” she says. “So, if you have any instability there, it can affect your gait [or how you walk]. If one small thing’s off there, you’ll compensate, and that goes up the kinetic chain.” Cue potential knee, IT band, hamstring issues—the list goes on.

Aside from providing a solid foundation, barefoot training can also enhance that mind/body connection. “There are nerves and receptors throughout the foot that send signals through the body, reminding certain muscles to turn on like a light switch,” says Lazoff, who believes everyone can benefit from barefoot training, even if it's just bodyweight resistance work. Once the chain’s lit up, strength gains are imminent. Who cares if you get a little side eye in the process?

Beginners to barefoot training should start with something simple. "This can literally be as basic as balancing on one foot," says Dr. Johnson. From there, you can move on to lower-body moves "such as squats, one legged squats, lunges—anything that incorporates the rest of the leg, thigh, and core will inherently strengthen the foot and the ankle," she continues, adding that it's important to stretch out your calves, as well as the bottom of your feet regularly, too. (Do yourself a favor and buy a massage ball if you don't already have one.)

Lazoff also likes squats and lunges for newbies to barefoot training. But she suggests working with kettlebells as well. "All movements are fantastic, especially squats, swings, deadlifts, and overhead presses," she says. "Try moving in all planes of motion." You can even do some cardio sans sneakers. "Running can be done barefoot, but be careful with impact activities as a novice," Lazoff warns. "It takes a lot of time to build up strong enough feet to run successfully without shoes. I suggest a low profile running shoe to start, then making a transition for sprints and shorter runs."

Should you decide to ditch your kicks next time you hit the gym, Dr. Johnson just has a couple words of caution: "I could see some dangers in that for sure," she says. "You could drop a heavy weight on your foot, which is not uncommon, or stub your toe. Having no shoes on at the gym has dangers within itself." Because of this, she recommends being a little extra mindful about where you put your best (bare) foot forward—oh, and maybe invest in some cute socks.

**Power of Positivity**

Walking with bare feet offers many benefits to your well-being and health. This healthfulness is due to the grounding properties of the earth and the electrical activities it provides. Often, allowing your bare feet to connect with the planet is referred to as earthing, as well.

With shoes on, the benefits aren’t able to make it into your body. The energy has to go directly from the earth into your bare skin to be effective.

Since shoes are so normal and the benefits of them are often discussed and advertised, earthing tends to be forgotten. Humankind generally believes that wearing shoes is more beneficial, but this is not the case. It can cause pain, instability, and loss of strength.

Even more surprising, wearing shoes can prevent the earth from making you healthier. Grounding can lead to increased immunity, disease prevention, and many other beneficial situations.

Surprising Benefits of Walking with Bare Feet

Once you learn about them all, you’ll be ready to take on the barefoot lifestyle right away.

**1. Improves Sleeping Habits**

Studies published by the National Institutes of Health shows that letting your feet touch the ground can improve your sleep. The studies show that it changes the electrical activity in the brain, allowing for feelings of well-being and relaxation. The practice of earthing or grounding should be done for at least a couple of minutes each day.

Additionally, earthing helps reset your biological clock, which contributes to developing healthy sleep patterns. Once your biological clock has been reset and you’ve relaxed, you’ll be able to normalize your sleep schedule. If you’ve been having trouble sleeping, taking a walk without shoes on might be your best option.

**2. Helps Reduce Pain**

In the same ways that touching your feet to the earth improves sleep, it also reduces pain in your body. The electrical brain activity provided from the universe will make it so that you don’t feel pain as severely. It can help with sore muscles and headaches, plus it can reduce the severity and length of migraines.

This pain reduction initially comes from grounding the body and reducing free radicals. Other painful situations can be alleviated come from the way a person carries themselves, otherwise known as their gait. Walking barefoot helps reduce pain because often back, knee and hip pain stem from a person’s improper gait.

Some shoes may cause a person to walk improperly or hinder their posture and balance, throwing off their gait. By walking with bare feet, this can be avoided, and you’ll walk the way nature intended for you. Allowing yourself to walk naturally will also help reduce or prevent pain in your feet, legs, hips, and neck.

Wearing shoes also cause other painful and uncomfortable foot ailments that can lead to further problems. These ailments include, but are not limited to, bunions, corns, calluses, fissures, and hammertoes. With these issues affecting nearly 75% of Americans each year, this is something many can benefit from.

**3. Reduces Stress Levels**

As with the others, this relies on the electrical brain activity that results from grounding. Since it allows you to relax, you’ll feel less stressed. Pair that with the improved sleep you’ll be getting, and you’re sure to be much less stressed.

Plus, earthing helps to regulate emotions and bring balance to the nervous system, both of which affect stress. This can help decrease both stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms rather quickly. The more time you spend outside without shoes, the more that the earth’s charge can benefit you in this way.

**4. Contributes to Positive Brain Development**

The more you walk outside without shoes on, the better your senses develop. You’ll become more alert, noticing sounds and things around you that normally wouldn’t. This helps you stay present at the moment, instead of letting your mind wander.

It also helps you notice small details, sharpening your eyesight and allowing you to focus more quickly. Plus, it stimulates your senses of touch and hearing since you’ll be fully in tune with your surroundings. The fresh air and scents of nature will heighten your sense of smell, as well.

**5. Your Feet Will Be Stronger**

Despite some people believing that walking barefoot may be painful or dangerous, this isn’t the case. Instead, walking without shoes on will make your feet stronger. It also teaches you to be more aware of your surroundings, leading you to avoid stepping on something dangerous.

Wearing shoes also weaken feet and ankles, because you’re making them dependent on artificial support. When you have no shoes on, the muscles in your legs, ankles, toes, and feet are stimulated, making them stronger.

Not only will they be stronger, but they’ll look better, too, because they will be more toned. You’ll also be less likely to get injured because of the development of strength and balance.

**6. Improves Blood Function and Helps Reduce Heart Disease**

High blood viscosity, which is a thickening of the blood, is a contributor to heart disease. When the blood gets too thick, it causes clumping in the cells. Earthing can lead to a decrease in blood viscosity, helping to prevent or lessen the risk of developing heart disease.

Additionally, it can help with hormone regulation and lessen symptoms of menstruation. This has to do with the pain-reducing properties, but it also has to do with improved blood function.

**7. Foot Massage**

The unevenness of the ground caused by small pebbles, stones, and rifts have the same effectiveness as a foot massage. As the feet are massaged, energy will be able to flow freely through the body.

Since walking without shoes gives you a free foot massage, it’s important to know the benefits of a foot massage. These benefits include, but are not limited to, the following:

blood circulation improvement

relaxing

helps with sleeping

reduces pain in the body

improves your mood

decreases feelings of depression

improves foot health

reduces swelling in the feet

**8. Reduces Risk and Development of Osteoporosis**

Studies show that earthing can change the number of minerals and electrolytes in the blood. Furthermore, the studies show that urine and blood tests showed less calcium and phosphorus being excreted.

These results came after just one night, showing that less calcium and phosphorus are lost from the body. Since osteoporosis develops and worsens as mare of these minerals are lost, it directly impacts the risk. The more often you go without shoes, the more your risk decreases.

**9. Helps Treat Diabetes Mellitus and Thyroid Disease**

People who take anti-diabetic drugs to treat non-insulin-dependent diabetes showed improvement through earthing. After only a few days, fasting glucose levels could be greatly decreased.

Earthing also affects the hepatic, hypothalamus, and pituitary gland, all of which directly affect the thyroid. For those who suffer from hypothyroidism, wearing no shoes can stimulate the thyroid and increase free thyroxin.

**10. Strengthens the Immune System and Gives Energy**

Because it increases red blood cell counts and lowers the number of white blood cells, it improves immunity. You’ll be better able to fight off any viruses or bacteria that may cause you to become ill. Plus, it’ll help prevent you from contributing immune-related diseases.

When you are feeling well, energy is essential to keep feeling that way. The ground emits higher frequencies, which help increase the energy levels of those who connect with it.

Things to Keep in Mind About Walking in Bare Feet

With all of these benefits, you might be tempted to kick your shoes off and get started right now. If your feet aren’t used to this, though, you may want to ease yourself into it. This discomfort is because your foot and ankle strength may not be where they should be.

You should first go without shoes for small increments of time. As you build your balance and strength, you can do it for longer times. You could also do yoga, which will help build the strength that you need.

You should also be careful of the terrain you are walking on. Rocky areas may have sharp rocks that could cut your feet. You should also avoid areas that have broken items, areas with nails or glass, and slippery areas.

Some areas don’t provide the grounding benefits, either, so you can avoid those, as well. These surfaces include the following:

asphalt

wood

rubber

plastic

vinyl

tar

tarmac

sand

concrete

ceramic

Thoughts on Surprising Benefits of Walking with Bare Feet

Walking with bare feet has so many surprising benefits. You are likely shocked that you didn’t know how beneficial it is sooner. With shoes being so highly praised, though, grounding is often forgotten or ignored.

Now that you know all of the benefits, you’ll want to spend time earthing each day. Remember to ease yourself into it if your feet aren’t used to being bare. The benefits will begin quickly, and you’ll soon be healthier, more energetic, and have a better feeling of well-being.

The next time you are walking through your yard, make sure to go barefoot. Before you know it, you’ll do it without a second thought, and you’ll begin to notice the benefits at work.

SOURCE: Power of Positivity (<https://www.powerofpositivity.com/bare-feet-surprising-benefits/>)