

## Running barefoot, or almost

By Charles Clines



It seems the view of several runners that taking to the streets and trails without shoes is the best way to go. There are a few websites, such as [www.runningbarefoot.org](http://www.runningbarefoot.org) that promote this "natural" way of running, which is supposed to help prevent injuries.

Barefoot proponents contend that the modern running shoes promote a heel-to-toe style that is detrimental to a person's skeletal makeup, or something like that, which leads to more injuries.

The first runner I met who ran barefooted was Kevin Blaquiére, a Michigan transplant. I met him at a race in 2006 and he told me how it hurt at first running without shoes, but he acclimated and had sustained no injuries in the three years after he switched. He had run the Cowtown's half marathon barefooted, but said his experience wasn't too pleasant when the course went from cement to a section that he said had "cobblestones." He said that surface was uncomfortable.

For those who believe they need something between their bare feet and the running surface, there are "shoes," such as the Vibram FiveFingers that is made of a rubbery material that acts "like a second layer of skin." They look like socks with toes. There are several local runners who are trying this method. So far, I haven't heard anything negative from them. Even my son-in-law, Dustin, is running with them and his biggest test was at the 2009 Fort Worth Turkey Trot when he ran the 5K and 10K. As he and a few others have experienced after running almost barefoot, the calves can be sore until adapting.

Now, I don't know if running barefoot is better or not. However, I'm going to give it a try even though I have had no leg or foot injuries running with regular shoes. I have tried the five fingers shoes, but haven't gone more than a half-mile, so far. I did notice one thing; my left foot slaps the surface more than my right. Maybe I'm lopsided. I'm trying to make the foot slaps more even, but it's not easy. Also, going down a hill can be a jarring experience, but I believe a little more practice will help solve that.

I expect to wear them more now that the weather is turning warmer. Going barefoot, or almost, is not something I recommend with it's colder, unless you like cold feet.

At The Cowtown, there were at least three runners in the 50K Ultra wearing "shoes" that were either the FiveFingers or something similar. Dustin, who also ran the 50K noticed two of them taking a rest on the course "and they looked like they were hurting," he said.

Or course, there probably were some who were wearing "regular" running shoes hurting, too, on the 31-plus-mile trek.

To help make the transition, I've switched to running flats for my training runs and I've noticed a difference. First, I'm carrying around less weight on the end of my legs, and I have had very few aches or pains. Also, I'm running more on the balls of my feet rather than heel-to-toe. Actually, I think I'm really more running flat-footed than anything. Maybe I need to take a video just to make sure.

Anyway, I'll be updating the "barefoot" experiment throughout the year. For those who have tried, or are trying, this method, let me know what you think. [Send me an e-mail](#) and I'll share your opinion here.