

## Shelving the Vibrams -- for now, at least

By Charles Clines



**Update of the update:** While going out for what was to be a 40-minute run on Oct. 29 with my regular running shoes, I had to stop after 25 minutes because of severe tightening of my right calf. When I was running with the Vibrams, I never experienced any problems with legs or knees, but did get a possible bruise on the ball of my left foot. So, I'm thinking of giving the Vibrams another chance, but will build up my distances more slowly than I did the first couple of months I began wearing them.

**Update:** After running the FWRC Mercury 10K on Oct. 16 with my Vibrams, I came away with a very tender left foot. The ball of that foot had been sort of tender ever since I ran in them for 45 minutes about a month ago. I've since logged a 60-minute and 68-minute run in them leading up to the FWRC run. The tenderness wasn't a problem until

after the Mercury Run. If anything, I probably increased my distance too fast. But I figure if I start having foot problems now after almost 28 years of running of not having foot problems, then the experiment might not be worth it.

**The good about Vibrams:** They weigh almost nothing. They're great in wet conditions because they don't become waterlogged. They always start some kind of conversation, so it's a good way to meet people when you're wearing them. For shorter distances, I never had a problem.

**The bad about Vibrams:** My feet always were requesting more padding or cushioning every time I began reaching 45 minutes on my training runs. They stink unless you wash them with some kind of soap after each run. Sometimes it's a little difficult to get all the piggies in the correct piggy home. The one going to market sometimes wanted to stay home, etc.

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Here's a previous update: I just logged the longest jog in my Vibrams on Sunday (Oct. 10), going 68 minutes. My previous longest time was 65 minutes. The difference: During the 65-minute jog, my left forefoot began getting tender after about 45 minutes and it was sort of a mind-over-pain the last 20 minutes. The foot wasn't so tender during the 68-minute run, but both feet were requesting a little more cushion. Still, not bad. No other aches and pains afterward, so far. One great thing about the Vibrams I discovered when running in the rain and through puddles at the Rahr Oktoberfest 5K is that your shoes don't become waterlogged (because you don't have any) and it's not uncomfortable to wear wet Vibrams. They're much better than regular running shoes in wet conditions. I'm still not recommending them because everyone's feet are different, but I'm still sticking with them, at least for a while longer. Oh yes, watch for large rocks when wearing them....they don't feel good when you step on them. I've done it only twice. But I keep a sharp watch of what's in my path.

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### Why I did it

When I first became aware a few years ago that there are people who actually run barefoot, I had to investigate. It seemed as if not wearing shoes during a run would HURT.

So, I began reading articles that espoused the benefits of barefoot running and almost became a convert.

My sensitive feet, though, were holding me back. So, I went to my favorite park and jogged a half-mile barefoot. Actually, it wasn't too painful until I stepped on gravel or a some other small obstacle on the trail. This wasn't going to work.

Then, I was made aware of Vibrams, the FiveFingers "shoe" that was designed to give runners the benefits of barefoot running but with some padding to protect the feet. My first question, though, why FiveFingers and not FiveToes?

Anyway, I have decided to test them just to see if I notice any great benefits. I started by walking in them. I went a mile, then two miles. After becoming fairly comfortable walking in them, I started jogging. First, I went a half-mile. Surprisingly, at least to me, there was no foot pain or leg pain. Even the knee that I had surgery on eight years ago wasn't hurting.

So, I eventually upped the run and went a mile and then two miles. Feeling even more comfortable wearing them, I jogged for 33 minutes and then 45 minutes (I do my training by minutes and not by miles or kilometers). No problem except for a little tightness in my calves. Some runners have reported more than just a little tightness in their calves after running in them. Maybe they didn't try easing into them as I had. Also, before I began trying the Vibrams, I had started doing my training runs in flats rather than in my previous running shoes that had thicker heels.

I then tested them at a 5K. I jogged the Spur On Trail Drive 5K (as a bandit) on Sept. 11 and again there were no issues with the shoes. I do make a point of avoiding gravel, rocks and other debris on the roads and trails. Remember, I have sensitive feet.

It might be surprising that I can wear the Vibrams and not have sore feet because of how sensitive my feet can be. My not-yet 2-year-old grandson can walk barefoot in my backyard, which has rocks and limbs, and not flinch. I need shoes to navigate the same terrain.

I'm going to test the Vibrams for at least another month. I'll write a follow-up report after the test period.

So, if you haven't heard of Vibrams or other similar "shoes," then you might be interested in the reasons wearing them are beneficial.

Here are reasons and other information listed on the Vibram website:

The typical human foot is an anatomical marvel of evolution with 26 bones, 33 joints, 20 muscles, and hundreds of sensory receptors, tendons and ligaments. Like the rest of the body, to keep our feet healthy, they need to be stimulated and exercised.

Many experts believe the shoes we wear not only cast the foot in a protective form, but also weaken our foot and leg muscles, leaving them underdeveloped and more prone to injury. And while there are many occasions where traditional footwear is essential for protection, safety, and security, it is equally important to stimulate and exercise the foot in a more natural state on a regular basis.

That's why we recommend wearing FiveFingers for exercise, for play, and for fun.

Stimulating muscles in your feet and lower legs will not only make you stronger and healthier, it improves your balance, agility and proprioception.

Vibram FiveFingers is different than any other footwear on the planet. Not only do they bring you closer to your environment, FiveFingers deliver a number of positive health benefits—by leveraging all of the body’s natural biomechanics, so you can move as nature intended.

## **6 Reasons to Wear Vibram FiveFingers:**

**1. Strengthens Muscles in the Feet and Lower Legs** - wearing FiveFingers will stimulate and strengthen muscles in the feet and lower legs, improving general foot health and reducing the risk of injury.

**2. Improves Range of Motion in Ankles, Feet and Toes** – no longer ‘cast’ in a shoe, the foot and toes move more naturally.

**3. Stimulates Neural Function Important to Balance and Agility** - when wearing Vibram FiveFingers, thousands of neurological receptors in the feet send valuable information to the brain, improving balance and agility.

**4. Improves Proprioception and Body Awareness** – those same neurological receptors heighten body awareness, sending messages about body mechanics, form, and movement.

**5. Eliminates Heel Lift to Align the Spine and Improve Posture** – By lowering the heel, our bodyweight becomes evenly distributed across the footbed, promoting proper posture and spine alignment.

**6. Allows the Foot and Body to Move Naturally, Which Just FEELS GOOD.**

So, are you convinced, yet? I'll let you know in about a month whether I am.