

Tarahumarans, a tribe living in North West Mexico who run ultra marathon distances, regularly without shoes. They complete up to 120 miles to hunt, communicate with other villages and travel.

Lee Saxby is a running coach who has spent 20 years studying biomechanics, sports rehab and evolutionary biology. He has partnered up with VIVOBAREFOOT shoes

We are built to run with a superb system of long levers, strong powerful glutes, a natural spring system in the feet and calves and the ability to cool ourselves efficiently through sweating

and hopes to spread the word about the benefits of barefoot running.

UF: Lee, why do you feel that barefoot running is such a hot topic right now?

LS: We are currently suffering from the 'disease of civilisation' and there is a new paradigm shift in medicine where we are looking back at evolution to help us see why we may be suffering today. This is called 'evolutionary medicine.'

UF: So what does evolution tell us about our running injuries?

LS: Nature gave us three forms of locomotion: walking, running and sprinting. Jogging however, is neither a walk nor a run and it changes the kinetic forces through the body. This slow motion heel striking is not a natural movement and can cause injury.

UF: But for years we were told that heel striking was the correct way to run?

LS: When we change gear from a walk to a run, our feet should give us feedback that it is time to switch from a heel to toe motion (walking), into a forefoot landing. If you were to jog barefoot on concrete landing on your heels, it would hurt your feet and that

Illustration: Bryan Christie

Dare to Bare

Bare foot running is currently very popular, yet it is a controversial subject: **Caroline Sandry** investigates this ancient and modern activity.

After reading 'Born to Run' by Christopher McDougall, I became increasingly curious about man's relationship with running and why nowadays so many people become injured from doing the very thing that helped us to survive as a species. We are built to run with a superb system of long

levers, strong powerful glutes, a natural spring system in the feet and calves and the ability to cool ourselves efficiently through sweating. So why is running, something that is so natural and instinctive, keeping physiotherapists and sports injury clinics in business?

McDougall asked this question. In his famous book he talks about the

feedback would tell you to switch up a gear and land on the forefoot. If however, you have cushioned shoes on, you do not feel the pain of the heel-strike and can therefore continue to run at that jogging pace.

UF: So too much cushioning is not a good thing?

LS: One problem is that proprioception is vital to healthy movement: In order to create skilful movement your body needs feedback from receptors in the body. That feedback comes from the eyes (about 10%) the inner ear (about 20%) and the remaining 70% comes from proprioception, which is largely from the feet. If you are wearing highly cushioned trainers, your foot cannot feel the ground and you lose a high percentage of your proprioceptive feedback which increases the chance of injury. Proprioception is like our sixth sense, or the forgotten sense as I call it!

Lee Saxby has created a free e-book that outlines his approach to safely transitioning to running barefoot: *Barefooting - The Pros and Cons* – Lee Saxby.

<http://trainingclinic.vivobarefoot.com>

Going Bare – A Natural Running Course

Everything I had read about barefoot or natural running made total sense to me but it pains me to tell you that I am one of those slow, heel striking joggers. So I decided to embrace the movement back to bare and attended a 'Natural Running' course in association with Newton shoes which was held at the Drummond Clinic in Maidenhead. Ex pro-running athlete Mike Trees explained the concept of what he calls 'natural running' and showed us footage of running greats – 95% of who forefoot ran. He also demonstrated a great exercise to show how your body should work when running:

1. **Take your shoes off and stand up**
2. **Hop on one leg**
3. **Hop on the other leg**
4. **Hop/jump up and down with both feet**
5. **Now slow that right down to hop-stop-hop-stop and feel the difference!**

As soon as you slow down, you lose the elastic recoil which is naturally present in that hopping movement. If you apply that to running, you can see how the jogging speed that Saxby talked about sucks all of the 'spring' out of your stride. Repeat the process again, and notice how energy sapping it is to hop-stop-hop-stop. You have to use much more effort to lift off the ground each time. Now imagine that over a half marathon or longer!

The rest of the two day course with Trees was spent practising drills and applying the theories. Trees reiterated that you should build up slowly into natural running and work on drills such as hopping, skipping and short bursts of running and with my calves at bursting point I couldn't agree more!

If you want to try out Tree's methods, there are several courses, or start by reading 'Natural



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Running' by Danny Abshire which is packed with info, drills and training plans to get you running better whatever your starting point.

To bare or not to bare: How did it feel?

My running workshop left me incredibly sore and virtually unable to walk for at least 10 days (no surprise after two days of hopping!). As soon as I was able to move more naturally I began to follow the advice in the book, heading out for short sessions, mixing for example 3 x 100m runs with butt kicks, knee raises, skipping and hopping. I ran in natural running shoes (you must progress very gradually to barefoot running over time and your feet need to be protected from stones and other sharp objects). Unfortunately, each session resulted in such sore calves that a sports therapist I consulted predicted injury (torn Achilles) was just around the corner.

I did encounter moments of bliss, such as the day that I tried to go out for a 'normal' run (I wanted to keep my mileage up) in my old trainers only to find that I had de-conditioned my usual running muscles resulting in shin pain after about a mile! I took my shoes off and ran barefoot in the grass and for a mile it was gorgeous – I was fast and light like a gazelle! Unfortunately, this was followed by such tightness in my calves that I almost considered crawling home! One week later, when I could walk again I decided to hang up my barefeet (!) and stick with what had worked for me for the last 15 years. I felt disappointed, but I had really missed my running and so I swallowed my pride and resumed my shod plodding.

Although barefoot running and changing my running style was not for me at this stage in my life, it has worked for many others. I spoke to Emmy Graham (33) who is a new runner,

and very enthusiastic about barefoot running, 'I signed up to run the 2012 marathon having never run before. I was already using Vibram five fingers for walking to and from work and decided to use them for running too. I attended an Alexander technique running course and was a bit over-enthusiastic. I headed out to run, 'like a gazelle' but ended up with really tight and painful calf muscles, which put me back a few weeks at least. The Alexander teacher then pointed out that I should've applied the technique much more slowly and after following his advice I am now happily running 13 miles in my barefoot shoes.

To summarise, my advice would be to seek out expert help before trying to change your running style and to be patient. If you are struggling with an area of your running such as speed or injury, then barefoot running may be your panacea, but if you are happily running without any problems, then as Saxby says, 'If it ain't broke, why fix it?!'

Although I might not have become a Tarahumara-style runner, these tips from the experts have helped me to improve my running:

- * Increase your cadence (footfall)
- * Run faster (avoiding that jogging pace)
- * Perform dynamic stretches such as leg swings before running
- * Practice drills such as butt kicks and knee raises
- * Keep your head up
- * Kick your heel towards your butt as you run
- * Make your arms swing dynamically in rhythm with your legs
- * Relax your shoulders
- * Keep your eyes forward and neck straight

For a range of natural running courses with the Drummond Clinic go to www.drummondclinic.co.uk