

# Preparing Your Feet for Barefoot Running

By Dr. Robert Mirandola

As Robillard states, barefoot running should be as easy as kicking off your shoes and hitting the road. In my practice, however, I have many patients who want to begin barefoot or minimalist running, but are skeptical and fear these shoes will make them more prone to injury.

I address their concerns by referring to Lieberman's study which demonstrates that modern running shoes tend to cause one to land first on their heel, which causes impact forces that are 7 times higher than the impact of those who forefoot run. "These impacts add up," states Lieberman, "since you strike the ground almost 1000 times per mile!" So, through years of repetitive stress caused by traditional running shoes, these small impacts put excessive stress on the joints of the feet and ankles, which causes misalignment and leads to (or exacerbates) greater problems when uncorrected, such as flat feet or ankle sprains. To correct these misalignments, it is important to have your feet and ankles examined by a doctor of chiropractic. Through chiropractic adjustments, the bones of your feet and ankles are gently realigned and ligaments are strengthened to prevent further injury.

Apart from chiropractic adjustments, the muscles of the feet can be strengthened through exercise, and arches can be naturally supported without the use of orthotics. Here are three exercises that are designed to strengthen the muscles and arches of the feet and prevent future injuries.

**Towel crunches.** This is a great way to strengthen the many tiny muscles of your foot, called the interossei and lumbricals. Place a towel on a smooth surface, place your foot on the towel, and curl up the towel with your toes. Do this ten times, take a 30 second break, and repeat to complete three sets of ten.

**Resistance band Inner foot strengthening.** This targets the innermost muscles of the foot (posterior tibial muscle and abductor hallucis) and the ones that, when they are weak, cause over-pronation and flat feet. Tie a resistance band on the leg of a chair then use your inner foot muscles to pull the band toward the midline of your body without moving your leg, just your ankle. Hold for 10 seconds then relax for 10 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

**Resistance band Outer foot strengthening.** This targets the outermost foot muscles, the peroneals. Tie a resistance band on a chair leg as above, then use your outer foot muscles to pull the band towards the outside of your body, again, not moving your leg, just your ankle. Hold for 10 seconds then relax for 10 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

Dr. Robert Mirandola is a family chiropractor and owner of Allasso Chiropractic in Newton, MA. He helps competitive and recreational athletes perform at their best through chiropractic care. Dr. Mirandola is a minimalist runner himself.

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