

# A Shoe For Barefoot Runners

It's the latest trend in footwear: barefoot shoes.

Several companies &mdash; Vibram, Nike, Terra Plana &mdash; are creating shoes that look sort of like gloves for your feet. They're minimalist, with a little pocket for each toe, and they're catching on with a small but passionate community of runners who shun fancy, highly-engineered shoes and prefer to run as our shoeless ancestors did.

Guy Raz tried out a pair of Vibram's "FiveFingers" shoes on the National Mall, a popular jogging spot in Washington, D.C. Tourists stared in amusement as Raz ran down the gravel path, dressed in his work suit and a bright blue pair of FiveFingers shoes, chased by a producer carrying a big, fuzzy microphone. "It actually feels pretty good running in these barefoot shoes," Raz reports. "It almost feels like my feet know what to do intuitively." David Willey, editor-in-chief of Runner's World magazine, points out barefoot running isn't a new trend. But it has seen an uptick of popularity since the book *Born to Run* was published earlier this year. "The life cycle of any product sort of ebbs and flows," Willey says. Willey notes that running shoes were invented in the '70s by then University of Oregon track coach Bill Bowerman, who poured rubber compounds into his wife's waffle iron. "And the modern running shoe was born." Bowerman went on to become a co-founder of Nike. After that, companies kept adding new features for stability and motion control, but barefoot runners say those features change your gait, forcing your foot to fall near the heel and increasing the chance of injury. Willey says barefoot running can be helpful as a training exercise to build strength, but because we all run differently, it's not for everyone. "If you are a very efficient and biomechanically gifted runner, running barefoot could probably work for you," he says. Willey says those wanting to experiment with barefoot running need to build up to it. "If a lot of runners &mdash; or all the runners out there in America &mdash; did that tomorrow, the vast majority of them would get hurt very quickly and would have to stop running for a very long time." Willey acknowledges he does hear from some barefoot runners who say his magazine doesn't give them a fair shake. "We get people who believe in barefoot running saying that we are promoting running shoes for the wrong reasons." But for the most part, he says, it's not a partisan divide like the Apple/PC debate. "Running is a really great community, very collegial and very positive," he says. "They're pretty chill folks." That might be due to all the endorphins going through their body when they run. "We're all high as a kite," Willey jokes. Source: NPR.org