

TOP TEN TIPS TO BAREFOOT RUNNING

1. **Start slow!** The most common mistake is doing too much, too soon. Feet need time to strengthen. Drastically reduce your running distance. Start with a few hundred yards, then take a day off. Over the course of a month, gradually increase to a couple of miles.
2. **Learn barefoot, not shod.** Don't try to "transition" with a minimalist shoe. You want to learn the skill of running gently, and the best way to do that is barefoot. The ground gives better feedback when you're totally barefoot; heel striking will hurt. Furthermore, the still sensitive skin on your feet will prevent you from going too far before your body is ready.
3. **Learn on a hard, smooth surface.** A common misperception is that one should avoid hard surfaces. However, hard surfaces give clearer feedback on form, and form is a greater determinant of impact force than surface hardness. Barefoot running is most difficult on rough surfaces (gravel) or soft, uneven surfaces that allow bad form or hide obstacles (sand, grass).
4. **Use a forefoot strike, not a heel strike.** Modern high-heeled running shoes encourage a heel strike, and heel striking increases the impact with the ground and can lead to running injuries. Instead of landing on your heel, make contact with your forefoot first (or midfoot).
5. **Don't run on tippy-toes.** Don't run with an exaggerated forefoot strike. Running all the way up on your toes is a good way to get a stress fracture. Allow the heel to come down and "kiss" the ground.
6. **Run with shorter, faster strides.** Among recreational runners, long strides encourage heel striking; short strides make it less likely. Many overstriding joggers run at a cadence of 150-170 steps per minute, and increasing your cadence by 5-10% is an effective guideline. Though it's not a magic number, some barefoot runners aim for 180 steps per minute.
7. **Zone in, not out.** Barefoot running requires attention, particularly to scan the ground for obstacles. Never run with earphones; barefoot running is mentally stimulating, so you won't need a distraction. Silent running is gentle running. Shod joggers are loud, smacking the ground with their feet.
8. **Don't run through the pain.** Pain is a signal that something is wrong. Adjust and see how it goes. If it still hurts, stop for the day. Tight calves and muscle soreness are normal at first; bone, joint, and soft-tissue pain are not.
9. **"Relax, relax, relax!"**—Barefoot Ken Bob Saxton, barefoot guru extraordinaire.
10. **Enjoy the freedom.**