

## Are Running shoes Junk food for your feet?

We have all done this: Go to a “good” running store with “knowledgeable” employees, tell them how we run, tell them all of our aches and pains, our running history and then maybe the running store employee looks at our feet or how we walk or jog. The knowledgeable employee from the good running store then recommends the perfect shoe for us (out of hundreds and hundreds available) that will cure all our ills and let us run like gazelles.

More than likely these new shoes will just make things worse.

I spend a lot of my time teaching athletes good running technique. Most of the time the athletes come to me because they are injured and frustrated. Invariably they all have big, cushy, fat running shoes with thick heels. The first thing I tell is to buy the thinnest, most minimal running flats they can find (I wear the Mizuno Wave Universe 2, 3.5 ounces). They all look at me in shock and fear at the suggestion. “I can’t run in shoes like that,” they say, “I will get injured.” “Ah,” I reply, “but you already are.”

I don’t like typical running shoes because they destroy a runner’s perception of where they place their body weight when running. It allows, and even encourages, a runner to run with poor mechanics (at least for a while before the inevitable injuries start to pop up). If you lose your perception you will place your body weight on places that are not designed to handle your body weight, like your heel. Want proof? Go run barefoot on concrete. Where do you land, on the ball of your foot or your heel? Of course you land on the ball of your foot because it hurts too much to land on your bony heel. You automatically change your running style when you run barefoot because *you are trying to protect yourself*. When you put those big, cushy running shoes on, you lose your feeling of the need to “protect yourself” and go loping along, landing on your heels, sending shock waves up your body as you wonder why you get plantar fasciitis, shin splints, Achilles tendonitis, stress fractures or IT band problems. For a dramatic illustration of this, check out this video

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9itkEkcQ8WM&feature=rec-HM-r2>

There is some evidence that things are starting to change regarding thinking about running shoes. A great book came out this year entitled “Born to Run” which followed a legendary ultra running tribe in Mexico that runs unbelievable distances in horrible terrain in nothing but the flimsiest of sandals. The author brought out several interesting points about running shoes:

- 1) There is no scientific peer reviewed study that proves that running shoes will improve your running or reduce injuries. Not one.
- 2) 65-80% of runners will get injured every year. These numbers have increased with the advent of supposedly more sophisticated shoes.
- 3) The single biggest determinate of whether or not you will get injured running is not training miles, running speed, training surface, body weight or history of previous injury. Rather it is the cost of your running shoes. Runners wearing

shoes costing more than \$95 are 123% more likely to get injured than a runner wearing a shoe less than \$40. (I recommend for \$19.95 the Saucony Kilkenney)

Now, I am certainly not advocating that you go out tomorrow and run a marathon barefoot. Rather, take a look at what you are doing when it comes to running and reexamine it. Do I run injury free? Do I run as fast as I want to? If the answer is “yes” then keep doing what you are doing. But if not, you may want to look at your equipment and its affect on your technique. Are those shoes helping you or are they just “junk food?” If you look at your running and decide you want to change something (like new shoes) begin using them slowly, maybe one short run per week. Don’t make dramatic changes quickly; allow your body time to react and adapt.

Please try to lay off the junk food