

September 2011

Happy feet!



RECENTLY, I BOUGHT some minimalist shoes because they look trendy. I used them on the treadmill and during training sessions. They made a big difference. I could feel my muscles burning. It feels like I'm a beginner all over again.

Studies have shown that wearing barefoot-style shoes may help strengthen feet and lower leg muscles because they don't have all of the layers of cushioning you find in most fitness shoes. Biomechanically, we're best off duplicating as closely as possible what nature has designed, says Stephen Pribut of the American Academy of Podiatric Sports Medicine. It can promote your sense of balance, improve muscle alignment, reduce orthopedic pains, and lessen the chance of injury. Shoes with fancy technology throw off your stability, so you work twice as hard to counter that instability.

Does this mean you should toss your cushiony kicks and start wearing your minimalist shoes? Not yet. Feet need to be strengthened gradually. Start walking in the shoes, then add a little running, or use them during strength training. It may take some weeks as you integrate them into your routine.

Switching to barefoot-style sneaks may not be for everyone. Consult your doctor first.

"If you have joint problems or need orthotics for other foot ailments, you're probably not a good candidate for these shoes," says exercise physiologist Michele Olson.

The foot is our foundation, so do what works best for you – whether you have lower back pain or flat feet, whether you're an athlete or wear high heels. If you want to integrate barefoot-style shoes, go slowly by taking short walks around the block or just working in the yard first. For longer hours of activities, try using your super-supportive shoes if needed.

BUZZ: Have you heard of **Specificity of Training?** This principle says that only the muscle or muscle group you exercise will respond to the demands placed upon it. By regularly doing curls, for example, the muscles involved (biceps) become larger and stronger, but curls will have no effect on the muscles that are not being trained. So, for training, it is important to work all your major muscles.

Fit at 50:

Follow the 'U Curve'

YES YOU CAN! President Obama, who just turned 50, proves that if you stay healthy and fit, your 50s can be the best decade of your life.

"These days, we consider men in their 50s to be young at heart—literally and mentally," says Harvard Medical School's William Pollack.

By some measures, your brain is at its most powerful, exhibiting the best combination of speed and judgment. That's one reason why the average age of a Fortune 500 CEO is 56. This is also powerful evidence that daily exercise shapes a successful person.

"The main reason I work out is to clear my head and relieve stress," he told *Men's Health*. "It's a great way to stay focused." Most of his workouts are in the gym.

"I'll lift one day and do cardio the next," he said.

Reaching midlife is usually met with some pessimism. We're cautioned to "enjoy life while you can." Some of us want to buy a sports car or motorcycle or travel around the world. Men and women in their 40s, 50s and 60s, who weather the physical and emotional changes inherent to this life stage, actually get better, not worse. In place of complaints and fears, there are sentiments like, "I'm more confident and solid now," or even, "I feel better than ever."

People follow a general psychological path in adult life that appears somewhat like a U-shaped curve according to findings in the *Journal of Social Sciences and Medicine*. Art Kramer, who studies aging at the Beckman Institute, says that although we obviously slow down both physically and mentally, there is also evidence of new kinds of growth as we enter our 50s for what is called "crystallized intelligence." Kramer makes a distinction between fluid and crystallized intelligence. The former is about raw processing speed; the agility with which you are able to solve new and unfamiliar problem. The latter comes from experience, hard and fast knowledge gained over years.

As we age and recognize the limited time ahead, we are more focused on gaining the kind of insights and knowledge that we need to prioritize goals. With age comes wisdom and with wisdom, we may find that we make smarter life choices that are more likely to bring us satisfaction.

For President Obama and the millions of baby boomers celebrating their 50th birthday, does the U-curve path mean they have already hit rock bottom and are on their way back up? Most of us view Obama as surpassing goals few of us will ever achieve. He can look back with pride and look forward with greater optimism and staying healthy and fit, his life will surely follow the U-curve and enjoy the life's journey ahead.



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