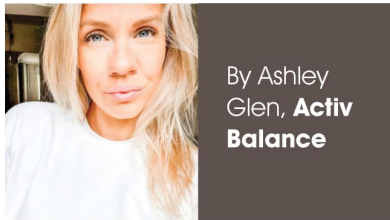




# Why sometimes the best thing to do, is to kick off your shoes



By Ashley Glen, **Activ Balance**

Have you given barefoot training any thought? In the simplest terms, barefoot training is engaging in physical exercise of some form without wearing your trainers and socks. With a total of 52 bones, 33 joints, 107 ligaments, 19 muscles and tendons in our feet, it's even more astonishing that we have more nerve endings per square centimetre in the foot than any other part of our body.

Here's why working out without shoes is a smart idea, plus what to know before you go all bare.

## Benefits of the Barefoot approach

If you feel brave enough to bare all at the gym, we are pretty sure you'll want some data behind you to explain why you are training with no shoes on before someone tries to splain on you. So here are some backed-by-science reasons why going barefoot is not so bad for you at all.

You develop instant proprioception, which is the awareness of how your body moves in space. Being able to feel your feet as you squat and lunge will feel a little easier to execute and you are more aware

of your foot placement. Just simply connecting to the ground and different textures will also make you feel more connected to your body and more centred.

You improve your stability. You won't turn into a seasoned yogi straight away, however the more information you can get from your feet, the more stable your base and so, the better your balance and posture overall. You'll be able to engage smaller muscles on the bottom of your feet, solidifying that the stronger your feet, the stronger your core, glutes, and hips are. Your brain registers stability and strength through your feet, as a point of safety and optimal connection to the world around you, so when you remove that connection, your brain thinks it lacks stability.

More flexible and stronger feet. With barefoot training, you work your muscles in your feet as they fight to keep you upright and balanced. Barefoot training helps increase leg strength, which allows your body to encounter better shock absorption. The more you practice, the more you're able to develop your foundation.

You can improve on imbalances. A squat with shoes on will feel completely different without. When training without your shoes on, you may be about to assess why your barefoot squat is the way it is. You'll be able to assess what is going on with your hips, knees, ankles. It's a great opportunity to film yourself moving with your shoes on and then without.

You can spice up your training. As

simple as removing your shoes completely changes your approach to your training. Barefoot training can really help you develop your mind-body connection and also mix up your approach to your training. If you're feeling bored at home over this summer, try your favourite workout next time without your shoes and socks on.

## What if I'm flat-footed or have a high arch?

All different types of feet can safely benefit from barefoot training. Barefoot training not only trains your muscles but your nervous system. Your foot may have a unique foot imbalance compared to the next person, so of course, individual foot mobilization and strengthening techniques may apply. A clear exception would of course be those who are in pain or have a severe flat foot deformity.

## Is barefoot training really ideal for my workouts?

You can unlace for almost any workout, from barbells to kettlebells to bodyweight strength training and even some plyometric moves. If you're planning to go wild at CrossFit or lifting Olympic-style lifts that are extremely heavy, think 5RM, then, of course, looking into a shoe with a thick stable base is the best approach. You could then incorporate barefoot training into your warm-up and cool-down. I like to use my toe separators when warming up to help widen my foot for a more stable squat and a sense of mind-mat connection before I go into an intense workout. If you're planning on jumping around barefoot, bring more awareness to the best neutral landing for you as possible, and of course, try not to land hard.

## I'm unsure how to feel a connection with my feet

Stand up and lift one of your arms, ask someone to push your arm down relatively strong. Check-in with how you feel within the base of your body and along with your core to your arms. Now try it again and make sure if you're lifting your left arm, lift your right toe upwards or if you're lifting your right arm, lift your left toe upwards. How did that feel now? You'll realize it's much harder to keep your arm up. This can show you in an instant why a solid foot foundation is the secret to your strength and stability.

**Happy workout! Ashley x**

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