

A Review of Shoe wear

We are often asked to comment on which shoes may be most suitable for a patient. While that answer is up for debate, an important step to answering that question is understanding what is available out there. Here we will briefly outline some of the characteristics of different categories of running shoes that you may encounter.

1. Minimalistic shoes – attempt to approximate barefoot running

General Characteristics:

- Reduced/minimal cushioning
- thin soles, no heel lift (traditional shoes have 10-14mm heel lift)
- no arch support
- wide metatarsal area/toe box
- very flexible, generally very light

Example brands:

- Vibram Five Fingers.
- vivobarefoot
- Merrell Barefoot
- New Balance Minimus
- Nike Free

2. Maximalist shoes – attempt to maximize cushioning and protection of foot

General Characteristics

- Thick cushioning
- Rigid sole
- Slightly reduced heel lift compared to regular shoes
- Wide base
- Lightweight for its size

Example brands:

- Hoka One One
- Merrell All Out Peak
- Mizuno Wave Sky
- Skechers GOrun Ultra R
- New Balance Fresh Foam 980 Boracay

3. Zero-drop shoes – footwear where the heel is at the same height as the ball of the foot

General Characteristics

- Often overlaps with minimalistic shoes
- Variable structure, but emphasis is that there is zero heel lift

Example Brands

- Altra Torin 3.0
- Merrell Vapor Glove 2
- Nike Flex Fury 2
- Vibram FiveFingers Bikila

There are many studies out there looking in to the pros and cons of each type of footwear and whether they are effective in reducing running injuries. The jury is still out but hopefully this will cast some light on what your patients may be talking about!

Jim Niu MD, CCFP

Sport and Exercise Medicine Fellow, University of Ottawa

Advisor Dr. Taryn Taylor BKin, MSc, MD, CCFP (SEM), Dip Sport Med