

Barefoot or not barefoot.... That is the question

You will have likely seen many people and athletes lifting in the gym with bare feet. But why? Today's post will look at the benefits of barefoot training and in addition the importance of foot position when lifting.

Barefoot training

As the name suggests barefoot training involves wearing no footwear. This could be to lift weights in the gym or indeed used for running training. There has been many a discussion in the training community as to the advantages and disadvantages of such training, although there isn't much decent clinical evidence on whether this type of training is beneficial or not.

Why use barefoot training?

Having bare feet ultimately is going to give you and your body a heightened level of body awareness due to increased contact with the floor. This can be advantageous in many ways especially in drills involving foot and ankle mobility and stability. A great example would be the use of a ankle mobilisation. I would always conduct such exercises involving the foot and ankle in a barefoot state.

Stick ankle mobilisation



I like conducting such drills like this as you can feel the movement better in this position and in addition, if i was teaching such a movement I can actual see and feel what is happening which might not be as apparent in a training shoe.

I also at times like athletes and clients to lift, i.e squat and deadlift variations in barefeet. In addition to the reasons mentioned above, for some, being in a barefoot position enables the foot to generate more torque and have a greater influence on knee and hip position during lower limb movement.

For example, in a barefoot stance an athlete is more easily able to generate a lateral directed force from the foot into the ground prior to a squat. This can be cued by asking the athlete to try turn the feet outwards without the feet actually moving. That torque created enables stiffness through the foot and ankle creating a stable platform to lift and in addition pull the foot out of a position of pronation. This cue has been particulary useful for those athletes that excessively pronate or those often termed as 'flat footed. ' Getting out of excessive pronation also benefits the knee and hip by preventing possible knee valgus and hip internal rotation stress respectively which are detrimental to knee and hip health and movement quality.

Tripod stance

Regardless of what lift or activity that is being produced, be it a squat, deadlift or running the aim is generally to gain a neutral foot position. Having equal amounts of weight distribution between to foot is key to being able to create a stable foot position or 'tripod stance.'

A succesful tripod stance position would involve equal distribution of weight between the three points of;

- Base 5th metatarsal
- Heel bone
- Base 1st metatarsal

If weight can be distributed evenly between these three points then the foot is likely to favour a neutral foot position and in addition will provide a stable platform for movement.

Correct tripod position



Therefore in my opinion the reason for opting to go barefoot or not isnt the main issue. The question is with what footwear type or barefoot style stance will enable you to get into a neutral foot position or tripod stance. This will differ between individuals.

Getting that tripod stance is the key. As a result it doesnt really matter whats on your feet if anything as long as we maximise and make use of a good solid foot and ankle position for movement.

I hope this post has given a bit of an insight into barefoot training. I intend to post another article shortly developing on some of the points above. If you have any questions please get in touch.

Thanks for reading

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