

Supportive shoes a confusing term, runner attitude study finds

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New running shoes to burn off Christmas excess are a popular purchase in the New Year, but the terms associated with supportive footwear and alternative styles of running can be confusing, a new study has found.

In what they believe is a first of its kind study, University of Manchester psychologists conducted in-depth interviews with eight recreational runners to find out their attitudes to barefoot and minimalist [running](#) (minimalist shoes are designed to mimic running barefoot).

They found that there were strong negative reactions to barefoot running, with the interviewees concerned about risks regarding support and injury, without being clear what these might be.

Trusted sources of information about potential risks included shops which provided gait analysis, blogs and also anecdotal evidence from fellow runners. Health professionals and scientific research tended to be disregarded.

Most runners buy supportive trainers – but don't have a common or clear definition of what they are buying, leading to confusion even amongst the more experienced [runners](#) featured in the study.

Peter Walton carried out the study. He said: "When you buy supportive trainers is what you're buying different to everyone else? Ultimately if there is no clear definition, then people don't know that their shoes are meeting their expectations.

"Conversely, barefoot running has been used by humans for hundreds of thousands of years, yet running shoes as we know them were only introduced in 1972. Attitudes to barefoot running also centre around negative perceptions of the loose term 'support', yet without a foundation in evidence."

With around 25% of all [recreational runners](#) injured at any one time the researchers believe that the findings are important to help people make the best choices and have the best access to information.

Peter added: "People often have inconsistent ideas about barefoot and minimalist running, which are often formed by potentially biased sources and which may lead people to make poor decisions about barefoot and minimalist running. It is important to provide high-quality information to enable better decisions to be made about barefoot and minimalist running."

The paper, 'What do people think about running barefoot/with minimalist footwear? A Thematic Analysis,' appeared in the *British Journal of Health Psychology*.

More information: Peter D. Walton et al. What do people think about running barefoot/with minimalist footwear? A thematic analysis, *British Journal of Health Psychology* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/bjhp.12180](https://doi.org/10.1111/bjhp.12180)

Provided by University of Manchester

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