

elastic components of your muscles and connective tissue work more effectively at driving you off your toes, returning stored energy from your landing. In examining traditional footwear designs, thick, multi-density, less flexible midsoles and midsole plates and stiff heel counters isolate the foot from ground impact forces and the foot's ability to push off at the toes. Under those conditions, the foot, over time, gets out-of-shape and less able to adapt to changing conditions, opening the door to injuries.

So is minimalist running really new or just a marketer's reality? That is not to suggest the new light shed on this old subject is not welcome. For too long, the athletic footwear industry has shoe-horned a one-solution-fits-all approach to the running community. It took innovators like Newton Running, Vibram and ECCO to fuel this revived interest in running form and function.

Is this old idea makeover with new, up-to-date materials for everyone? Lighter weight, increased strength, more flexibility, enhanced stability and greater energy return make for compelling reasons to consider minimalist running. However, like any other activity, adopting the technique requires a commitment to your body's learning curve. It is a major paradigm shift from the traditional heel strike. You will have to listen to your body, constantly make

subtle adjustments, slowly increase your distance and intensity and even consult a coach if you are not improving. If you survive the learning curve, minimalist running will make you stronger. And as our coaches love to remind us, a stronger athlete is a better athlete.

## THREE MINIMALIST MODELS

For those of us underserved by the running industry's product torpidity, this revitalization of the less-is-more ethos has been a blessing. Finally, there is product for us to consider outside of racing flats. In the current state-of-the-movement, no shoes have made a greater impact than those by Newton

Running and Vibram (Five Fingers). As a former competitive runner involved in footwear product development for many years, I wanted to see what this noise was about.

Therefore, for this focus, I gave Newton Running's Neutral Racer, ECCO's BIOM B and K-Swiss' K-Ona a roll. Since I have been almost exclusively a midfoot striker throughout my running life, I was able to perform this task without a learning curve. Still, I read the brand's collateral (or, in the case of Newton, watched the DVD) on how to run. After more than 600 miles/999 kilometers of road and trail running, I am happy to report, the long wait to legitimize this category is over.

## NEWTON RUNNING NEUTRAL RACER

A couple of years ago, after being email bombed by all my triathlete friends and their friends for an

opinion about this shoe, I decided to go to the source. Danny Abshire, co-founder and chief technical officer of Newton Running,

in a mere five months of the April 2007 launch has created a phenom of a buzz generator.



Newton Running Neutral Racer

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AT THIS?**

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