

Shed Those Shoes!: How Being Barefoot Benefits Brain Development

Written by Rae Pica

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Nothing really startling there. But you might be surprised to learn that there's scientific evidence that barefooted is better. Among other things, bare feet are important to the development of the nervous system and the brain! Turns out the feet are the most nerve-rich parts of the human body, which means they contribute to the building of neurological pathways. Covering them in shoes, therefore, means we're eliminating all kinds of opportunities for children's brains to grow new neural connections.

Of course, worry keeps parents and teachers from setting children's feet free. One common concern is that kids will contract germs by going barefoot. (That's my mother's issue.) But our skin is designed to keep pathogens out. We're much more likely to become ill from touching something with our hands, which are in contact with so many things (including our mouths) during the course of a day, than we are from going barefoot. I'd hate to think we'd keep kids in gloves all day to prevent germs!

There's also concern about injury. But being barefoot actually toughens up the bottom of the feet, so unless children are walking on extremely sharp objects, they're not in any more danger of injury than they are when wearing shoes. In fact, being barefoot helps to strengthen the muscles and ligaments in the feet, which helps to prevent injuries like plantar fasciitis and bunions.

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