



## Going shoeless is best for children's development, research shows

### STAFF WRITER

CHILDREN who often walk barefoot have better balance and can jump further than their shoe-wearing peers, researchers say.

The findings were published in the journal *Frontiers in Pediatrics* recently.

The aim of the research was to evaluate the link between growing up barefoot or wearing shoes and the development of motor performance during childhood and adolescence.

The team comprised Professor Ranel Venter from the Department of Sport Science at Stellenbosch

University, her colleague Doctor Elbé de Villiers and researchers from the University of Jena and the University of Hamburg in Germany.

A total of 385 habitual barefoot and 425 shoe-wearing schoolchildren, aged 6 to 18 years, were recruited in South Africa and Germany for the

research. South African children who often went barefoot outperformed their shoe-wearing German counterparts in the tasks.

"The problem is that the growing feet of our barefoot children are forced into European sizes – the shoes are particularly narrow," Venter said. "It

also does not help if parents decide to buy bigger shoes – it changes the natural operation of the foot.

"Our research has shown that regular physical activities without shoes may be beneficial for the development of jumping and balance skills, especially in the age of 6 to 10 years."

