



■ STUDY

Barefoot SA kids better at balance, jumping

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A STUDY by researchers from South Africa and Germany found that young children who grow up walking barefoot have better balance and can jump further than children who wear shoes.

"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 6-10 years," says Professor Ranel Venter from the Department of Sport Science at Stellenbosch University.

Venter and colleague Dr Elbé de Villiers collaborated with researchers from the universities of Jena and Hamburg.

Venter says the aim of the research was to evaluate, for the first time, the link between growing up barefoot or wearing shoes and the development of motor performance during childhood and adolescence. "To our knowledge, no study has examined the potential relationship between regular barefoot activities and motor skills."

Three hundred and eighty-five habitual barefoot and 425 shoe-wearing children between 6 and 18 years were recruited in schools across rural and urban areas in the Western Cape, and Northern Germany.

Venter says the two populations were chosen due to their different footwear habits. "Whereas South African children are generally used to walking barefoot during the day, almost all German children wear shoes during school time and for most recreational activities."

Venter says all the children completed balance, standing long jump and 20m sprint tests.

"Results of these tests show that barefoot children in South Africa's primary schools performed better in balance tests than their German counterparts, who never walk barefoot. This may be related to the fact that the feet of South Africa's children are wider and more deformable."

