

Kids who go barefoot have better balance, study finds

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Children who grow up not wearing shoes have a distinct advantage over those who do, says a new study by Stellenbosch University.

According to the research, young children who grow up walking barefoot have better balance and can jump further than those 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 at the age of six to 10 years," Professor Ranel Venter from the department of sport science at Stellenbosch University said.

Venter conducted the re-

search alongside German academic Dr Elbe de Villiers of the University of Hamburg between March 2015 and June 2016, to evaluate the link between growing up barefoot or wearing shoes and the development of motor performance during childhood and adolescence.

They studied 385 habitual barefoot children and 425 shoe-wearing children between the ages of six and 18 from schools in the Western Cape and northern Germany, with 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 of recre-

ational activities," she said.

Habitually barefooted children are those who go to school barefoot and remain that way, even at home or while taking part in sport activities.

According to the research, "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.

"Barefoot children were also able to jump further from a standing position than German children.

"Children who are regularly barefoot had higher foot arches than children who never walked barefoot. Their feet were also more flexible and less flat," the study said. – *TimesLIVE*