



Running shoes have been undergoing a metamorphosis in the last few years. Sure, you can still find your traditional running shoes with their cushioned heels and midsoles. You can still get your favorite brand in motion control, stability, or cushioned types. However, there is also an emergence of something called the minimalist running shoe. These shoes have little to no cushioning, are extremely lightweight and flexible, and they have a flat profile from the heel to the toe.

There are many styles and flavors of minimalist running shoes (MRS). Currently the Army has banned the use of the Vibram FiveFinger's (shoes that have five separate individual compartments for the toes) while in formation or while wearing the PFU. However, all other minimalist type shoe are currently allowed. A survey of your Soldiers will likely reveal that there are good number of them that are wearing the Vibram FiveFingers or any of the other MRS types to workout and run. While there are anecdotal stories of these MRS reducing injury and improving performance, there are still no conclusive research studies that confirm these claims. What does seem clear is that switching from a traditional running shoe to a MRS requires a proper transition period to avoid potential overuse injuries. Our Soldiers are going to use these shoes and, as NCO's, we need to ensure that our Soldiers are equipped with information that will help them with a proper and safe transition.

There is no **one** right way to make the transition to MRS, but most programs require a period of 8-12 weeks. Running with MRS encourages a forefoot or midfoot strike when running. This type of foot strike means that rather than landing on your heel, you will land on the toes or mid part of the foot. This landing may lead to a reduced initial impact force on landing and relies on strong foot and leg muscles. A good transition program will focus on learning how to land on your forefoot or midfoot and will include strength exercises specifically for the foot and leg. Another important aspect of the transition is that you start with very short distances using the MRS – and build gradually over several weeks. This might be more easily said than done. Young, healthy Soldiers will probably be eager to get running quickly in their new MRS. As NCO's we need to make sure that we monitor how our Soldiers are transitioning.

In the near future, we will present a transition program. It will focus on a gradual shift from traditional running shoes to MRS, strengthening the foot and leg muscles, and developing proper running and landing form. Not all Soldiers will want to use MRS. Therefore, developing company- or platoon-wide transition programs is not the recommended approach. Small transition groups are likely better. Most importantly though, as NCO's we should provide the proper guidance or direction for our Soldiers that are using the MRS. Our goal is to make sure that our Soldiers stay healthy and physically fit, whether using traditional running shoes or the MRS.

I encourage you to use this forum to provide some feedback or thoughts on the MRS. If you don't know much about them or have never heard of them, stay tuned.

CSM Donna A. Brock
U.S. Army Medical Command