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Americans Need an Open Mind

I. Introduction

Most Americans will refuse to go barefoot in public places. If one does they tend to get odd looks and reactions from other people. I have gotten these strange looks when my friend and I went barefoot to both a park and the mall. We first went to a park to do some barefoot running. We ran into two people, a younger gentleman and an older woman. While the woman did not say anything about us not having shoes on, every time we passed her she would stare at our feet, puzzled. The young man, on the other hand, saw us and asked immediately why we were barefoot. I began to explain that it is very healthy for you. It seemed like he could not believe what he was seeing and hearing.

While walking throughout the mall barefoot, we received strange looks. We decided to go into Hot Topic to browse around, but almost immediately after we entered the store a worker rudely approached us. She said, "You have to put your shoes on and if you don't have shoes you must leave." While we knew we were not doing anything wrong, she was so rude we did not even bother arguing with her. So, we respectfully left the store. After that incident, neither of us has gone into Hot Topic again.

In America, people are supposed to have freedom and civil rights, yet they get judged on their choices of clothing. Imagine getting judged every day because of the clothes you wear or the style of your hair. Americans need to be more open-minded, especially when it comes to appearance. Going shoeless is a choice just like it is a choice to wear a certain shirt, yet people

get shamed for going shoeless. Not many Americans go shoeless in public places unless it is at the beach or some place that is considered “acceptable” in society. What they do not know is how beneficial going barefoot actually is for the health of their mind and body. If more people knew the benefits it would likely be more socially acceptable. Americans tend to be more-open minded when it comes to change in social norms. Americans should break cultural tradition and go barefoot because of all the health benefits going barefoot provides.

There are some terms which are used throughout this paper which are uncommon. One term which is frequently used is earthing/grounding; “Earthing (or grounding) refers to the discovery of benefits—including better sleep and reduced pain—from walking barefoot outside or sitting, working, or sleeping indoors connected to conductive systems that transfer the Earth's electrons from the ground into the body.” (“Healthy While You Sleep”) Another term referred to often is inflammation, “Inflammation is a process by which the body's white blood cells and substances they produce protect us from infection with foreign organisms, such as bacteria and viruses.” (Zealman) Lastly, podiatrist which is a foot doctor. For the purposes of this paper, going “barefoot” will also refer to the idea of wearing socks or other covering on the feet to keep them warm or clean.

This paper will be focusing on The United States of America. Going shoeless is socially unacceptable in America while places such as the United Kingdom have enforced shoeless policies in schools. The U.K is not much different from the U.S so it is unclear why is it such a big issue to go shoeless in the U.S. Many studies regarding academics are based on schools ranging from U.K to Scandinavia. These studies were decades-long, analyzing school children and their academic performance.

II. Arguments

First of all, going shoeless for as little as ten minutes a day will work wonders for your body's physical health. Going barefoot is an easier solution than taking medication for common diseases caused by inflammation which occur within many Americans. Many people prefer not wearing shoes rather than taking and paying for multiple medications. Going barefoot naturally reduces inflammation which is the number one cause of disease in the 21st century. (Lee and Sandler, Barefoot Benefits) Jessica Lee and Michael Sandler, co-authors of the book *Barefoot Running: How to Run Light and Free by Getting in Touch with the Earth* created a website summing up their book. According to the article "Barefoot Benefits", "free radicals, the pesky buggers responsible for inflammation carry a positive charge. Though these positively charged particles play an important role in our immune system and the healing response, if we don't have a way to drain them, they build up in our bodies, creating excess inflammation and cell/tissue damage." (Lee and Sandler) Earth is naturally negatively charged; therefore, grounding is a simpler and more natural way to rid your body of these radicals, causing inflammation, instead of taking medications. This is an amazing reason to begin going barefoot.

Going barefoot does not only reduce inflammation but also reduces age-related changes which will improve your health. When inflammation is reduced, so is the risk of getting diseases which occur in older people. Dr. Laura Koniver, who has been a physician for over 16 years, says in *The Grounding Guidebook*, "As it turns out, most so-called age related changes like arthritis...heart disease, stroke... is actually related to a lifetime of chronic inflammation." (3) Every year in the United States alone over 795,000 people have strokes. ("Stroke Facts") Inflammation is common for people who have heart disease and who have had a stroke. ("Inflammation and Heart Disease") Inflammation increases the risk of most diseases which come along during old age; therefore, reducing inflammation reduces risks of many diseases.

When you are at risk for things as severe as a stroke any and all precautions should be taken to reduce this life threatening risk. Going barefoot is the ideal solution to reducing not only inflammation risks but also risks of diseases. Going barefoot is ideal because it is completely natural, which is why Americans should break out of their comfort zones and go barefoot.

In addition to preventing diseases, going barefoot also prevents fungus and other infections. Such bacteria live in dark, moist places, which is why in science class when you observe such species they are typically kept in a petri dish then returned to a container after observations. An article from *Barefootprof* sums up Daniel Howell's book *The Barefoot Book: 50 Great Reasons To Kick Off Your Shoes*. Howell says, "The nasty germs, like *Pseudomonas*, actually live inside shoes and are otherwise not present on your skin. Same goes for the fungus that causes athlete's foot (*Tinea pedis*). In truth, the shoe is a warm, moist, hotbed for microbial growth and is the leading cause of foot infections." ("You Must Wear Shoes") It is shoes that cause organisms such as fungus to accumulate rapidly, causing athlete's foot and other fungal infections. Americans, especially those prone to said infections, should try going barefoot more often to prevent infection. This is yet another reason why Americans should go barefoot more often.

At the same time, going shoeless also improves academic performance. Most people are much more comfortable going shoeless; comfort is a major factor in a child's enthusiasm to learn. In an article from *The Telegraph*, a well-known newspaper in the UK, education editor of *The Telegraph*, Javier Espinoza, states, "Researchers have observed tens of thousands of children who leave their shoes outside the classroom and found that pupils are more engaged in their lessons, which in turn leads to better academic attainment." As seen in UK schools, going shoeless improves not only academic performance, but their comfortability and overall attitude.

This is yet another reason why Americans should be more open minded when it comes to walking barefoot since America is not much different compared to the United Kingdom.

In addition to the study Espinoza speaks about, not only does academic performance improve, but students improve as a whole. Students were studied for their entire academic career and it is clear that going shoeless in school has a positive impact. An article from *Independent* newspaper which is another well-known newspaper of the United Kingdom talks about a study which has been going on for decades and involved 25 schools around the world. It says, “Researchers at the University of Bournemouth found that pupils who leave their shoes outside the classroom are more likely to arrive to school earlier, leave later and read more widely – ultimately resulting in better academic achievement overall” (Pells). Bullying decreases, as well as the money which was spent on cleaning bills. Students were more attentive and relaxed. (Pells) If American schools were to introduce a no shoe policy like these schools in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia, it is likely that the effects will be positive just as they have in these schools.

Going barefoot is both extremely healthy for your body as well as your mind. Americans often go for walks to relieve stress along with many other reasons, so why not remove your shoes and have the positive effects of walking increase? An article was written by a doctor who has been in the field of integrative medicine since the early 1980’s states, “By walking, we exercise our muscles and cardiovascular system, improve our mental health, reduce stress and support our overall wellness. Simply taking our shoes off seems to multiply those benefits by allowing us to synchronize with the earth’s natural electric charge.” (Eliaz) Walking barefoot naturally improves your mind and body, which makes walking barefoot great and something Americans should begin doing more frequently, even though it is not a cultural norm.

III. Counterarguments

People disagree with going barefoot and say their feet are too sensitive and weak. While this may be true for some people, humans are meant to adapt to their environment. “Runbare” which is a website run by husband and wife Michael and Jessica who go barefoot regularly and wrote the book, *Barefoot Running: How to Run Light and Free by Getting in Touch with the Earth*, together. In an article intended for barefoot beginners, it states, “Barefoot Running and Barefoot Running Form means waking up your feet and lower legs. Initially, it’s much harder on your feet, as they’re forced to move 3-dimensionally, rather than 2-dimensionally in a shoe. And the stride is like doing a calf-raise with each and every step. To help the muscles, ligaments, tendons and bones to adapt, we need to begin slowly” (Lee and Slander, “How to Run Barefoot”). When walking barefoot, the skin will begin to get stronger in 4-6 weeks.(Lee and Slander, “How to Run Barefoot”) Going barefoot is not something you have to go out of your way to do. When going on a stroll you can simply remove your shoes and hold them until it is necessary to put them back on. Americans see going barefoot in public as dirty or dangerous when in reality more Americans should begin going against these myths and stereotypes to get in touch with the earth by going bare.

Although going barefoot is one of the easiest and most convenient ways you can improve your mind and body as well as prevent disease, most people believe that going barefoot in public is illegal. On the contrary, it is completely legal to go without shoes in most public settings. While it is true there are signs on the outside of many establishments that say “No shirt, no shoes, no service” there are no health codes nor laws against going barefoot. There is an organization called Society for Barefoot Living (SBL) and it is dedicated to helping and informing people who go barefoot in their everyday lives. Daniel Howell, author of *The Barefoot*

Book, and an active participant of the SBL states, “Members of the SBL contacted the health and/or agriculture departments of all 50 states and confirmed that there are no health codes or state laws that require shoes in businesses of any kind, including grocery stores or restaurants.” (“Myths”) Many people refuse to go barefoot because they believe in the myths that say there are health codes and laws against going bare in public. All in all, Americans need to break out of their comfort zone and start going barefoot for their own well being.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration also known as OSHA does not apply any rules or regulations on customers, only employees. It is rare that they require employees to have footwear on. The circumstances where shoes must be worn by employees is typically only because the employee may be in danger of getting injured. For example, under 1910.136- Occupational foot protection, it states “The employer shall ensure that each affected employee uses protective footwear when working in areas where there is a danger of foot injuries due to falling or rolling objects, or objects piercing the sole, and where such employee’s feet are exposed to electrical hazards” (“Health Codes and OSHA”). There are very few laws against going barefoot in public places. It is a very common assumption made by most Americans. More Americans should be informed that there are no laws against going barefoot. Once Americans know this they can begin going barefoot in stores and other public places.

IV. Conclusion

All in all, Americans should break out of their comfort zone by going barefoot. Going barefoot benefits your mind and body. There are many physicians who strongly suggest to their patients to go barefoot whenever possible. Some places where going barefoot has been put into practice are schools in the U.K, which have had shoeless policies for over a decade. The schools which had a no shoe policy have succeeded in many ways. Recall that these policies permit

people to wear socks--they are not necessarily "barefoot," strictly speaking. Applying shoeless policies in schools seems to be the most efficient solution to open the minds of children to the idea of going barefoot.

American schools should begin implementing shoeless policies to encourage people to go barefoot. These policies can be implemented by superintendents of the school districts. Parents must be informed that their children will be able to remove their shoes prior to entering the school. The policy must apply to everyone which means teachers, guests, and all students. Implementing the policy will require time to write and advertise. Aside from these costs, implementing a no shoe policy will not cost any money but instead, it will save schools money on their cleaning supplies. Schools will not have to clean the floors as often because there would not be as much dirt from outside the building. Many people will question this policy; therefore, its rationale and purpose will have to be thoroughly explained.

A no shoe policy will seem very odd at first and many people will resist and try to go against this policy. Parents may have many questions as to why this policy would be put in place. Once it is explained that there have been studies which show going barefoot improves academic performance most parents should be understanding. Students may also resist this policy because, as seen in many schools, children have expensive shoes that they love. It will be a major change, and most people do not like change. Students will feel odd at first, but they will soon realize it is much more comfortable.

Less bullying will occur because many children get bullied for their physical appearance. If a child does not have enough money for the new expensive Jordans that every other kid in their class has, the child may feel out of place and may be bullied. When shoeless policies are implemented, children's parents will not have to worry about spending their entire paycheck on

one pair of shoes. Students will also be more comfortable in schools. Most people do not wear shoes in their home and home is where they are most comfortable. Some students will love the idea of going shoeless in school. Most shoes are uncomfortable to keep on for seven hours at a time.

Implementing shoeless policies will solve the problem fairly quickly. In this day and age, information gets passed around within seconds. Students and parents will talk about these policies on social media. This will stir curiosity. When people are curious, they go straight to the internet to find out more information. People will be informed of the many health benefits of going shoeless; hopefully, they will begin to go shoeless as well. The internet is very powerful. Once one popular YouTuber or celebrity promotes going shoeless, almost everyone will begin doing so. People tend to be more open minded to new ideas when they know large numbers of people have begun doing it. You should begin going shoeless whenever possible. Tell your friends and family about the health benefits of going shoeless to get them to start going shoeless. Going shoeless or even barefoot could reduce the chances of getting many diseases and will improve your mind and body as a whole.

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