

THESE BOOTS WEREN'T MADE FOR WALKIN'



Top physio kicks out at €200 shoe

Eilish O'Regan
Health Correspondent

A **HUGELY** popular training shoe which promises wearers better posture and less pressure on the joints can increase the risk of falling over while walking or running, new research revealed yesterday.

The findings from the School of Physiotherapy in the Royal College of Surgeons Dublin will come as bad news to the tens of thousands of Irish people who have forked out €200 for a pair.

The MBT shoe - short for Masai Barefoot Technology - with a thick, low, rounded sole is supposed to mimic the natural conditions of standing and walking barefoot in natural terrain.

They adorn the window displays of many pharmacies and shoe shops and, despite the price, are a huge hit with Irish people who believe they will help them with their balance and posture.

However, the study led by physiotherapist Louise Smith showed that users are at increased risk of falling when walking and running.

She looked at 10 women and found the shoes significantly increased their postural sway which indicated the shoe was inherently unstable and compromised a person's chances of staying upright.

In contrast, this risk was not found in people wearing flat-bottomed runners or no shoes at all.

Ms Smith said yesterday little independent research had been done on the benefits and safety of the shoes.

One million pairs were sold across Europe last year and



MBT trainers have become hot fashion items but cost €200 a pair.

Irish people are among the most avid consumers.

Ms Smith said she would advise anyone thinking of buying a pair to have their balance assessed in advance by a GP or physiotherapist.

"If you have an increased postural sway you are more likely to fall," she said. Certain categories of people should avoid them, she advised.

"We would be definitely suggesting people be prescribed them rather than sold them as

a general over-the-counter shoe that claims to cure somebody's ailments.

"People with Parkinson's disease or people with already compromised balance should not be allowed buy the shoes or should be steered away from them because they are potentially more likely to fall in them.

"For the average person out walking to keep fit, a pair of well-supported runners is adequate," Ms Smith said.

Reacting to the survey, Christian May, who operates MBT Dublin as well as specialist shops in Naas and Navan, said he disagreed with the findings.

He said the shoes were used by members of the Leinster Rugby team as well as GAA teams, including the Meath football team.

"Initially people may feel unstable in the shoes but they are advised to build up their usage gradually. The body then adjusts to them. They are a Class 1 medical device in the EU and help build up the core muscles."

He said people should be fitted with the shoes before buying them and he would recommend them for most groups except people who suffer from vertigo or advanced Parkinson's disease.

"Many of the referrals I get are from doctors and physiotherapists."

What are they?

- **Invented by Swiss engineer Karl Mullerin in the early 1990s.**
- **Inspired by Masai tribesmen who walk barefoot on the natural, soft, uneven ground of their East African homeland.**
- **They were launched on the market in 1996 after years of research.**
- **They improve posture.**
- **They increase muscle usage and reduce pressure on hip and knee joints.**
- **Worn for comfort.**
- **They alleviate problems associated with back, hip, knees, ankles and feet.**
- **Help tone and shape the body.**
- **Now available in 20 countries.**

50%*

SALE

SALE



Up to 50% off Bathrooms & Tiles and up to 30% off Woodfloors. Absolutely everything reduced! While stocks last!

*Terms and conditions apply. Offers on selected products only. Open sundays during sale.

www.btw.ie

baths - tiles - woodfloors

Dublin: Sandyford, Tallaght.
Nationwide: Naas, Newbridge,
Kilkenny, Clonmel, Wexford, Sligo,
Mullingar, Drogheda, Castlebar,
Bray, Waterford, Limerick.
T: 1890 33 33 22 www.btw.ie
btw is an Irish owned company.