

A trampoline under your feet

Hiking without any pain despite having knee, hip and back problems? It sounds impossible, but many supporters swear by the kyBoot shoe, invented by the Thurgau-native entrepreneur Karl Müller.

Weightlessness is a wonderful feeling, according to the testimonies of people who have been in zero gravity such as astronauts. The closest we can get to this feeling on earth is by jumping on a trampoline or treading water – and also by wearing the special kyBoot shoe. I myself have a pair of the kyBoot model. These shoes incorporate air-cushion technology that relieves your muscles, improves your fitness, makes walking fun and stimulates the soles of your feet by making you ‘touch’ the ground. According to the manufacturer, kybun AG, the shoes benefit people suffering from a heel spur, knee arthrosis, problems with the Achilles tendon, back pain, a difference in leg lengths and burning feet. This is a long list of ambitious promises indeed. This new kind of shoe was first brought to my attention several years ago by Solothurn-based pharmacist Toni Löffel from the Kräuterhaus pharmacy. He was singing its praises, saying it would benefit my muscles and tendons, protect my joints and relax my back muscles. He recommended the shoes to me particularly because I have to travel so much. I followed his suggestion and tried on the shoes before buying a pair immediately. Now I am constantly wearing kyBoot shoes – at the very least when I am at home. I am always happy to wear them because the shoes make me feel like I am virtually weightless.

From MBT to kyBoot

The kyBoot concept was developed by entrepreneur Karl Müller, who is a native of Thurgau, Switzerland. He is the same person who developed the MBT shoe – the abbreviation stands for Masai Barefoot Technology – which has a strange round sole. Karl Müller was inspired to develop the MBT shoe in the 1980s while walking on clay soil in paddy fields in Korea. He spent several years living in the peninsula as an entrepreneur, opening restaurants, selling textile machines and becoming the first ski equipment importer in the country. He eventually felt overwhelmed by symptoms of burnout and returned to Lake Constance in 1990 in order to recover and find a new purpose in life. However, his entrepreneurial spirit never left him, and he continued to tinker with new inventions, eventually developing the MBT shoe with a rollover sole. He released the shoe on the market in 1997, starting a revolution in the shoe industry. Sales figures for the MBT shoe doubled each year, and two million units were sold by 2006. Müller then sold the company to his business partners, since he wanted to further develop the MBT concept in order to recreate the feeling of standing in paddy fields even more accurately. His partners didn’t want to go along with this new development, so Müller and his partners parted ways on good terms that same year. Müller’s innovative efforts paid off once again, culminating in the kyBoot shoe. The veteran innovator launched his new company with the name kybun AG in 2007. MechanoTherapy is the concept that is at the heart of kybun products. In simplified terms, the concept is similar to walking with a miniature trampoline under each of your feet. The official explanation is as follows: “Walking and standing on soft, springy material in your everyday life offer the perfect solution to back, hip, knee and foot problems and allow you to activate your veins and lymphs.” The portfolio of 3D shoes – which now includes a wide range of models, from lightweight high-heel sandals through to robust hiking boots – is now part of a comprehensive movement concept that also includes a springy mat (kyBounder) and soft treadmill (kyTrainer). Whether these products truly make walking and standing more enjoyable – and how long and how often people should and can walk around with these miniature trampolines under their feet – ultimately needs to be discovered by each person individually. The best way to find out is to try out the products!

Highly recommended by Solothurn-based pharmacist Toni Löffel, who has been wearing kyBoot shoes for many years

Wandermagazin (hiking magazine), Switzerland: Toni, you firmly believe in the kyBoot shoes and have been selling them for a long time now. Why are you so impressed by them?

Toni Löffel: I have been wearing kyBoot shoes every day for over five years. The soft soles activate the tendons and ligaments in your feet, strengthen your back muscles and make your posture more upright. If you do not maintain an upright posture, the soft soles would make you tip over forwards, backwards or sideways. The kyBoot shoe is also a training device that enables you to improve your health and fitness without a gym membership. Another benefit is that the shoes always keep your feet warm, thanks to the insulation effect of the soft soles – which are, by the way, made from polyurethane foam rather than air.

What kind of feedback have kyBoot customers given in your shop? Have there also been negative responses?

There hasn't been any negative feedback. But people who already have bad posture should make sure that their posture doesn't get worse. Furthermore, the shoes are recommended for people who weigh a maximum of 110 to 120 kilograms. Those who weigh more would flatten the sole, destroying the material properties of the sole's soft arch.

Don't the shoes make you more tired and eventually put a strain on your muscles and tendons?

Yes, this is true. Anyone can wear the kyBoot shoes, but sporty people find it easier to get used to wearing them than people who are not as physically active. The shoe frees the foot from the constraints that come with a regular shoe, and the tendons and muscles need to become accustomed to this freedom of movement. This may initially cause muscle soreness. Therefore, I recommend people who are new to wearing kyBoot shoes to only wear them for two to three hours each day and increase the time of usage very gradually.

There are also kyBoot hiking boots. Isn't the 'wobbly' way of walking a bit dangerous in the countryside?

I warn people against going hiking in kyBoot shoes before their body and musculoskeletal system are fully accustomed to the special way of walking required in kyBoot shoes. This process may very well take a year or longer. I would never wear the kyBoot shoes on steep flanks that are covered in grass or snow, where mountaineering boots are necessary. However, the sole provides a surprising amount of friction on slippery surfaces and even on snow, thanks to its softness and adaptability. (Tip: Tread firmly with each step!) You don't actually trip over when wearing these shoes, since they force you to walk carefully. kyBoot shoes have proven to be very suitable for hikes on flat and hilly terrains and even on stretches of hard ground.

What should new customers be aware of when they are thinking of buying or have already bought a pair of kyBoot shoes?

The customer needs to receive thorough advice and precise instructions before making the purchase. The customer should also bring in the shoes to be checked by a specialist after two to three years of normal use, since the shoes need to be replaced when the soles have been flattened out. This flattening process does not take place due to abrasion in the soles. In fact, you never shuffle when wearing kyBoot shoes, as the foot always rolls over fully from back to front. My experiences have shown that even people at a more advanced age feel comfortable with the kyBoot shoes surprisingly quickly. After an initial adjustment phase, their posture becomes more upright, sometimes even when they use a walking frame. In short, kyBoot shoes make you feel virtually weightless.