

## **Born to walk**

**Learn/relearn how to walk today! The editorial team of Gesundheits-Nachrichten (health news) tried out the very special shoe in Appenzell, Switzerland. Read on to learn more about their findings!**

Do you know that special feeling of placing your bare feet in a flowery meadow after spending a long time in the city? Everything feels very soft, but you initially feel shaky on your feet and need to find your balance, hesitating a little before taking the next step. Soon afterwards, walking becomes very pleasant. It is a sad reality that most people today have very few opportunities to walk barefoot. Alfred Vogel recommended walking in dewy grass in the early morning every day. But he would have also known that this is very difficult for most people living in cities. A special kind of shoe could offer an alternative. We were told that the kyBoot shoe not only allows you to walk on a soft, springy surface; it also enables a completely new way of walking. This, of course, piqued the curiosity of the editorial team at Gesundheits-Nachrichten (health news). We wanted to find out more about this special shoe, so we left our office chairs behind and set up an appointment with Karl Müller, the inventor of the kyBoot shoe, to try out the shoe ourselves.

### **It all began in a paddy field**

We feel very comfortable as soon as we slip into the shoes, though we sway slightly back and forth as we are not yet accustomed to the soft soles. But what are they like to walk in? We make our first attempt at walking in the kyBoot shoes on the Eggen Höhenweg hiking path, located on the north of Teufen, heading west. Karl Müller tells us about the basic principles of his philosophy as we explore the flexibility of our new shoes. Everything began in a paddy field in South Korea in the 1980s when Müller was suffering from pain in his cruciate ligament. Müller lived in South Korea for several years, and noticed that walking on the soft clay surface in paddy fields was good for his back. He began to search for a way to introduce this feeling into everyday life. To this end, Müller, who studied engineering at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, developed the world's first ever shoe to feature a rollover sole, the MBT shoe (short for Massai Barefoot Technology), in 1996. This invention eschewed the widely accepted belief at the time that the main function of a shoe should be to support the foot. Müller's idea was to constantly make the foot feel unstable through the rollover motion, which in turn forces the foot to activate all muscles and ligaments.

### **Like walking on a cloud**

However, Müller was not fully satisfied with the MBT shoe. This is why he invented the kyBoot shoe ten years later. The kyBoot shoe replaces the rollover 'swaying' motion with a soft, springy sole that improves posture. Unlike the MBT shoe, which primarily made the foot unstable in the forwards direction, the kyBoot shoe is elastic and flexible in a way that creates freedom of movement in all directions. This flexibility trains and relieves the muscles while protecting the joints. Unlike the MBT shoe, the kyBoot shoe does not require a special walking technique. We notice while testing the kyBoot shoes that, in addition to being very comfortable, the shoes also force our feet to become far more active. "Human beings were born to walk," says Karl Müller. The simple truth is that we humans have forgotten to walk properly. To remedy this problem, the walk-on-air principle developed by Müller combines comfort with active training for the foot muscles. As a result, the shoes genuinely make you feel like you are walking in a meadow.

### **Widespread lack of exercise and movement**

Human beings only use a small fraction of their innate physical capabilities when they walk. This is because many paths and staircases – which are commonly made of asphalt – make it difficult for us to carry out natural movement patterns. Furthermore, we frequently spend long periods of time sitting in chairs, which weakens our muscles and negatively affects our stability. Studies show that the average person spends over half of each day sitting. This not

only damages our muscles, it also leads to other serious consequences such as obesity, back pain, increased risk of diabetes and heart disease as well as a wide range of other ailments. Some scientists even claim that sitting is more dangerous than smoking – even for a person who does sport – though there hasn't been any conclusive evidence for such claims so far. We stand in a small grove as Karl Müller demonstrates an exercise to help us understand that there is a wide range of muscles between our extensors and flexors. Standing on one leg with the other leg bent at a right angle, we move the hovering foot in circular motions. It is not easy to keep our balance on the forest floor while wearing the soft kyBoot shoes, but we pass the first test and, given that we spend the majority of our time working in an office, we are quite pleased with our performance. According to Müller, most people today do not sufficiently train their deep inner muscles. These muscles include our core muscles, pelvic floor muscles, muscles between our vertebrae along the spine as well as muscle bundles that run diagonally. These muscles stabilise the body like a corset and keep the posture upright.

### **A shoe dedicated to the muscles**

Neglecting the deep inner muscles can lead to back pain, and having weak pelvic floor muscles, for example, increases the risk of incontinence. The majority of the people from the previous generation and the generation before that did not have such problems because they were active throughout the entire day, training their deep inner muscles automatically. Children back then would often run around the school barefoot. In contrast, the average person today moves very little, walks around in poorly made shoes (such as high heels) on paths made of asphalt and puts a disproportionate amount of focus on training their surface muscles. As a result, deep inner muscles are neglected. If you walk barefoot on an unstable surface, your deep inner muscles are activated in order to compensate for the slight instability in your movements. But who has the time to walk through a forest on a regular basis? kyBoot shoes provide a solution, as they simulate this very sensation of walking barefoot. The springy polyurethane (PU) material not only ensures that impact is absorbed, it also makes sure that the foot has enough room to adapt to the shape of the ground.

### **Air in the sole**

The honeycomb air structure of kyBoot soles creates an air cushion between the foot and ground. The air cushion ensures that the material adapts to the soles of your feet and that the pressure is optimally distributed on the foot. Your muscles are activated instead of being constrained as they are when you wear conventional shoes. Karl Müller illustrates how this process works by making us complete an interval training exercise on a steep patch of the ground. We walk slowly, keeping our posture upright with our knees outstretched. We keep our gaze facing straight ahead, roll over each heel and stay as long as possible on each leg. In this process, we also realise that our accustomed way of walking until now is more like shuffling than walking. Karl Müller's exercise forces us to take full strides by making us bounce slightly backwards with each step. As a result, our bodies automatically begin to stretch, our chests widen and our lungs can breathe in deeply. At the end of our little march, Karl Müller explains that his shoes are specially designed for people who need to stay standing for long periods of time or carry out intense physical work for their professional lives. But kyBoot shoes are also perfectly suitable for people who need to spend many hours in an office each day but still want to train their deep inner muscles in various ways.

### **Our verdict**

The kyBoot shoe is most suitable for people with joint problems who go on short journeys within the city or take short walks on hard surfaces. But the shoe is also an excellent alternative for people who wish to experience the sensation of walking on natural surfaces. You quickly become accustomed to the initial feeling of instability. Afterwards, the shoes always feel light and comfortable to wear. They do not constrict or compress any of your muscles. It isn't until the following day that you truly feel the effects that the shoes have on your muscles. You feel a light, tingling sensation in your calves. But this tingling does not come from the deep inner muscles, but rather, the foot muscles. This way, even tired and

stiff feet can be reactivated. The kyBoot product range is very diverse and offers everything for everyone, from closed and half-open shoes through to sandals.