

Gonzaga University

The Repository of Gonzaga University

Human Physiology Faculty Scholarship

Human Physiology

6-9-2017

Measurement Agreement Between a Newly Developed Sensing Insole and Traditional Laboratory-Based Method for Footstrike Pattern Detection in Runners

Janet H. Zhang-Lea

Roy T.H. Cheung

Ivan P.H. Au

Zoe Y.S. Chan

Winko W. An

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.gonzaga.edu/physioschol>



Part of the [Medicine and Health Sciences Commons](#)

Authors

Janet H. Zhang-Lea, Roy T.H. Cheung, Ivan P.H. Au, Zoe Y.S. Chan, Winko W. An, Alfred Man, Fannie O.Y. Lau, Melody K.Y. Lam, K.K. Lau, C.Y. Leung, N.W. Tsang, Louis K.Y. Sze, and Gilbert W.K. Lam

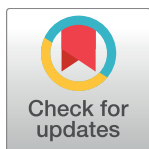
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Measurement agreement between a newly developed sensing insole and traditional laboratory-based method for footstrike pattern detection in runners

Roy T. H. Cheung^{1*}, Winko W. An¹, Ivan P. H. Au¹, Janet H. Zhang¹, Zoe Y. S. Chan¹, Alfred Man¹, Fannie O. Y. Lau¹, Melody K. Y. Lam¹, K. K. Lau¹, C. Y. Leung¹, N. W. Tsang¹, Louis K. Y. Sze², Gilbert W. K. Lam³

1 Gait & Motion Analysis Laboratory, Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, China, **2** Persona Surgical Modelling, Hong Kong, China, **3** Li Ning Sports Science Research Center, Beijing, China

* Roy.Cheung@polyu.edu.hk



OPEN ACCESS

Citation: Cheung RTH, An WW, Au IPH, Zhang JH, Chan ZYS, Man A, et al. (2017) Measurement agreement between a newly developed sensing insole and traditional laboratory-based method for footstrike pattern detection in runners. PLoS ONE 12(6): e0175724. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0175724>

Editor: Steven Allen Gard, Northwestern University, UNITED STATES

Received: February 16, 2017

Accepted: March 30, 2017

Published: June 9, 2017

Copyright: © 2017 Cheung et al. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Funding: This study is a government funded research project (Innovation and Technology Fund (Project number ITP/085/15TI), Innovation and Technology Commission, The Government of the HKSAR) (You may refer to the funder's homepage at www.itf.gov.hk). However, the funding body did not play a role in the study design, data collection

Abstract

This study introduced a novel but simple method to continuously measure footstrike patterns in runners using inexpensive force sensors. Two force sensing resistors were firmly affixed at the heel and second toe of both insoles to collect the time signal of foot contact. A total of 109 healthy young adults (42 males and 67 females) were recruited in this study. They ran on an instrumented treadmill at 0°, +10°, and -10° inclinations and attempted rearfoot, mid-foot, and forefoot landings using real time visual biofeedback. Intra-step strike index and onset time difference between two force sensors were measured and analyzed with univariate linear regression. We analyzed 25,655 footfalls and found that onset time difference between two sensors explained 80–84% of variation in the prediction model of strike index ($R^2 = 0.799$ – 0.836 , $p < 0.001$). However, the time windows to detect footstrike patterns on different surface inclinations were not consistent. These findings may allow laboratory-based gait retraining to be implemented in natural running environments to aid in both injury prevention and performance enhancement.

Introduction

There has been an increasing interest in footstrike pattern detection during running, possibly because of its potential relationship with injury [1–3] and performance [4]. There are three types of footstrike patterns: rearfoot strike (RFS) refers to when the heel lands before the ball of the foot; forefoot strike (FFS) refers to when the ball of the foot lands before the heel; and midfoot strike (MFS) refers to when the ball and heel of the foot land at similar times [5]. It has been reported that RFS, when compared with MFS or FFS, results in a higher impact loading [6], which has been associated with many running injuries [7]. However, greater calf strain may result from a FFS pattern, which may cause Achilles tendinitis [8]. Biomechanically, a

and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript and only provided financial support in the form of authors' salaries (In this study, the funder support Mr. Alfred Man (Man A.) in the form of salaries) and/or research materials. We also declare that the previously submitted statements relating to the author contributions are correct and accurate.

Competing interests: Dr. Gilbert W.K. Lam is an employee from the Li Ning Sports Research Center, which is also a sponsor for this project. Similar to the funding body, the sponsoring company did not play a role in the study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript and only provided financial support in the form of research materials. Mr. Louis K.Y. Sze is currently an employee of a 3D printing company i.e. Persona Surgical Modelling (<http://www.persona3d.com.hk/>). However, during the project period, he was a researcher from the Industrial Centre of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and he was not financially supported by the funding obtained. The research team has submitted a patent application at the State Intellectual Property Office of the People's Republic of China (Ref #1610200CN) for the sensing insole design and the algorithm. This does not alter our adherence to PLOS ONE policies on sharing data and materials. Competing interests: The research team has submitted a patent application at the State Intellectual Property Office of the People's Republic of China (Patent name: "Footstrike pattern measuring insole and algorithm"; Ref #1610200CN). This does not alter our adherence to PLOS ONE policies on sharing data and materials. The authors declare no competing interest otherwise.

MFS is the optimal footstrike pattern but past research has indicated that runners find it difficult to self-adjust to a MFS [1]. Regarding running performance, when speed is increased by 1 m/s, the odds of having a FFS or MFS relative to RFS increased by 2.3 and 2.6 times, respectively [9]. Hence, it may be beneficial to provide real time information about footstrike pattern to runners.

Currently, measurement of footstrike pattern in consecutive footfalls is mainly restricted to a laboratory setting. Footstrike pattern is usually determined kinetically by the strike index (SI), which measures the location of the center of pressure (COP) at initial contact along the long axis of the foot as a percentage of the total foot length [10]. A RFS, MFS, or FFS is defined as such when the SI is between 0–33%, 34–66%, and 67–100%, respectively. Unfortunately, force data are not always available during continuous running. In addition, un-optimized signal-to-noise ratio at initial contact may affect the accuracy of the COP calculation [11]. More importantly, SI measurement requires sophisticated equipment and therefore continuous footstrike pattern detection outside a laboratory environment remains difficult or costly.

With the advancement of sensor technology, emerging studies have explored the potential application of wearable sensors for gait analysis [12,13], which would allow for outdoor biomechanical measurement. In terms of footstrike pattern detection, a previous case series used a simple circuit, which consisted of a single force sensing resistor at the heel region, to modify footstrike patterns in runners [14]. However, in that particular study, the device appeared to be unable to differentiate between MFS and FFS. In view of the fact that footstrike pattern refers to the timing and the location of foot at contact, an additional force sensing resistor at the toe region may be a potential solution for footstrike pattern detection. More specifically, it is expected that a RFS may trigger the heel sensor before the toe sensor, and vice versa for FFS; while MFS may trigger both sensors at similar times. As a result, the onset time difference (OTD) between heel and toe sensors may provide a surrogate measure of SI. We believe that a mobile measurement of footstrike pattern may prevent injury and enhance running performance by gait retraining, which is an intervention shown to effectively modify running biomechanics [15].

Hence, this study sought to determine if SI can be estimated by measuring the OTD between heel and toe sensors across various surface inclinations. We hypothesized that as OTD increased (towards earlier onset of toe sensor relative to the heel sensor), SI would decrease across the full spectrum of footstrike patterns.

Materials and methods

Subjects and procedures

A total of 109 healthy adults (42 males and 67 females; age range = 18–38 years; mean age = 21.5 ± 4.2 years; height = 1.67 ± 0.09 m; mass = 56.8 ± 8.3 kg) free from any active lower-extremity injuries were recruited. All of the subjects signed an informed consent form and the experiment was approved by the Departmental Research Committee of the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Two force sensing resistors (1087-1001-ND, Digi-Key, MN, USA) were firmly affixed at the heel and the second toe of both left and right insoles to collect the time signal of foot contact (Fig 1). Reflective markers were placed according to a previously established model [11]. After standardized lower limb stretching exercise as a warm-up, each subject was asked to run on a self-paced instrumented treadmill (AMTI, Watertown, MA, USA) with the standard test shoes (ARHK, Li Ning, Beijing, China) at 0°, +10°, and -10° inclinations. All of the subjects were asked to RFS, MFS, and FFS with an augmented visual feedback [16]. The trial sequence (3 inclinations x 3 footstrike patterns) was randomized using an online program (www.randomizer.org). Each running condition lasted for two minutes with a 1-minute rest interval to avoid fatigue [17].

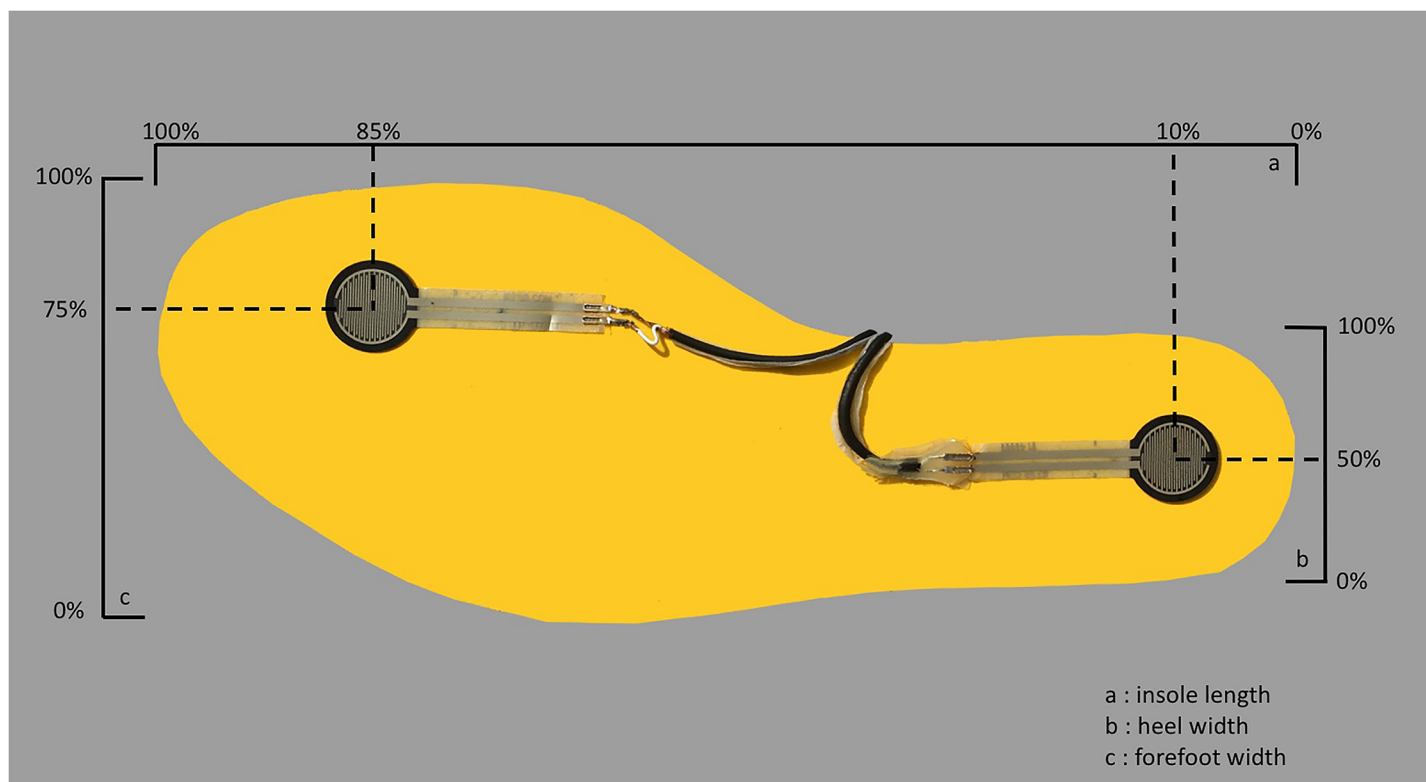


Fig 1. Location of the force sensing resistors.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0175724.g001>

Data analysis

Ground reaction force and motion data were recorded at 1,000 and 200 Hz respectively before being filtered at 50 Hz with a fourth order Butterworth lowpass filter [18]. The last 30 footfalls in each running trial were extracted for analyses. The SI of each footfall was computed according to the method described in a previous study [10]. Corresponding OTD was also measured and was defined by the triggering time of the toe sensor relative to the heel sensor. A negative OTD thereby indicated an earlier onset of the heel sensor compared to the toe sensor and vice versa. In order to compare subjects with different foot sizes, the OTD was normalized with subjects' foot length. Specifically, the measured OTD was linearly corrected by multiplying a ratio between the subject's foot size and a standard length (23 cm).

Statistical analysis

Univariate linear regression was performed to assess intra-step agreements between OTD and SI. We also conducted subgroup analyses according to different surface inclinations. All data was processed using SPSS.21[®] statistics software of package (Chicago, IL, USA). Global alpha was set at 0.05.

Results and discussion

A total of 29,430 footfalls (109 subjects x 3 inclinations x 3 footstrike patterns x 30 footfalls) were collected. However, 3,775 steps were excluded as the COP of their initial contact were at the split portion of the treadmill and therefore, a total of 25,655 footfalls were analyzed (S1 Table). The relationships between SI and OTD is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Linear univariate regression analyses predicting strike index (SI) from onset time difference between heel and toe sensors.

	Surface	B	t	Beta	VIF	p	95% CI of B	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
SI	All	0.444	268.69	0.859	1.0	<0.001	0.441	0.448
	Flat	0.440	215.77	0.914	1.0	<0.001	0.436	0.444
	Inclined	0.425	179.10	0.894	1.0	<0.001	0.420	0.430
	Declined	0.507	205.43	0.913	1.0	<0.001	0.502	0.512

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0175724.t001>

The linear regression models with SI across surface inclinations are shown in Eqs (1–4) below.

$$\text{Overall :- } SI = 0.444 * OTD + 45.84, R^2 = 0.836 \quad (1) \leftarrow$$

$$\text{Level :- } SI = 0.440 * OTD + 42.27, R^2 = 0.836 \quad (2) \leftarrow$$

$$\text{Inclined :- } SI = 0.425 * OTD + 57.02, R^2 = 0.799 \quad (3) \leftarrow$$

$$\text{Declined :- } SI = 0.507 * OTD + 39.00, R^2 = 0.833 \quad (4) \leftarrow$$

With the Eqs (1–4), corresponding OTDs at 33% and 66% SI were computed (Table 2).

This study described a sensing insole design including a simple circuit to predict footstrike pattern in distance runners. The data showed that OTD explained 80–84% of the variation in the prediction model of SI. In view of the response time (<3 ms) of the sensor used in this study, the time windows should be sufficient to differentiate between RFS, MFS, and FFS in distance runners.

Such technology could potentially be used to build a sensing insole to continuously measure footstrike patterns in runners. However, we found that the OTDs to detect footstrike patterns during running on surfaces at different inclinations were not consistent. Future application of our findings should consider the surface inclination using other devices e.g. gyroscope. We acknowledge that there are currently other pressure sensing insoles available on the market, such as Pedar (Novel, Munich, Germany) or F-scan (Tekscan, Boston, MA, USA) systems, which can fulfill the same purpose. However, the current system, which contains two force sensing resistors and costs approximately US\$20, should be more cost effective than the existing pressure sensing insoles. Some researchers have used a foot-mounted accelerometer to detect footstrike pattern in runners [19]. However, such measurements may disregard the fact that some runners with MFS or FFS may still present with high impact loading [20] and, therefore, could lead to the misclassification of footstrike patterns. In view of its cost (US\$20) and measurement accuracy (R squared up to 0.84), the proposed device should be regarded as a cost-effective method to continuously measure footstrike patterns in runners.

Table 2. Cutoff onset time differences (ms) at 33% and 66% strike index (SI).

Surface	SI at 33%	95% CI		SI at 66%	95% CI	
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
All	-28.92	-29.12	-28.66	45.41	45.71	45.00
Flat	-21.07	-21.26	-20.88	53.93	54.43	53.45
Inclined	-56.52	-57.19	-55.86	21.13	21.38	20.88
Declined	-11.83	-11.95	-11.72	53.25	53.78	52.73

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0175724.t002>

Laboratory-based gait retraining has been used to prevent running injuries, rehabilitate injured runners, and enhance running performance [21,22]. For instance, a previous laboratory-based gait retraining program successfully modified footstrike pattern in a group of runners with patellofemoral pain leading to an improvement in runners' symptoms after training [18]. However, laboratory accessibility is usually limited and subject preparation for a biomechanics evaluation or gait retraining is time consuming and resource driven. More importantly, whether or not the subjects are able to maintain the newly learnt motor pattern outside of the laboratory is questionable. Therefore, the findings of the present study may be able to allow gait retraining outside the laboratory environment.

We have several limitations in the present study. Firstly, we did not test the sensing insole in other shoe models. This test shoe was selected because it is a neutral shoe model with nominal foot arch support. Such a design allows for a flat shoe-foot interface and avoids mistriggering due to insole torsion. Secondly, we recruited only young healthy adults for this study, which may limit the generalization of our findings to the elderly or injured runners. Thirdly, the relationship between OTD and surface inclination was not explored at extreme inclination angles and future study in this area is therefore warranted. Finally, the prediction model may be further enhanced by considering other parameters, such as running speed.

Conclusions

In the present study, we describe a novel but simple method to continuously measure footstrike patterns in distance runners using inexpensive sensors.

Supporting information

S1 Table. Strike index and corresponding OTD when running on different surfaces.
(XLSX)

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge Mr. Jason Tsoi for his professional advice for the insole design. We also thank Ms. Aislinn MacPhail for reviewing the manuscript.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: RTHC WWA IPHA.

Data curation: JHZ ZYSC AM FOYL MKY LKKL CYL NWT LKYS GWKL.

Formal analysis: RTHC WWA.

Funding acquisition: RTHC GWKL.

Investigation: FOYL MKYL KKL CYL NWT.

Methodology: RTHC WWA IPHA LKYS GWKL.

Project administration: RTHC.

Resources: RTHC LKYS GWKL.

Software: RTHC WWA IPHA.

Supervision: RTHC.

Validation: RTHC.

Visualization: RTHC.

Writing – original draft: JHZ ZYSC AM FOYL MKYL KKL CYL NWT LKYS GWKL.

Writing – review & editing: RTHC WWA IPHA.

References

1. Almeida MO, Davis IS, Lopes AD. Biomechanical Differences of Foot-Strike Patterns During Running: A Systematic Review With Meta-analysis. *J Orthop Sports Phys Ther.* 2015; 45: 738–755. <https://doi.org/10.2519/jospt.2015.6019> PMID: 26304644
2. An W, Rainbow MJ, Cheung RTH. Effects of Surface Inclination on the Vertical Loading Rates and Landing Pattern during the First Attempt of Barefoot Running in Habitual Shod Runners. *BioMed Res Int.* 2015; 2015: 240153. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2015/240153> PMID: 26258133
3. Lieberman DE, Venkadesan M, Werbel W a, Daoud AI, D'Andrea S, Davis IS, et al. Foot strike patterns and collision forces in habitually barefoot versus shod runners. *Nature.* 2010; 463: 531–535. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature08723> PMID: 20111000
4. Cheung RTH, Wong RYL, Chung TKW, Choi RT, Leung WWY, Shek DHY. Relationship between foot strike pattern, running speed, and footwear condition in recreational distance runners. *Sports Biomech.* 2016;0: 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14763141.2016.1226381> PMID: 27593384
5. Cavanagh PR, LaFortune MA. Ground Reaction Forces in Distance Running*. *J Biomech.* 1980; 13: 397–406. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0021-9290\(80\)90033-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0021-9290(80)90033-0) PMID: 7400169
6. Breine B, Malcolm P, Van Caekenberghe I, Fiers P, Frederick EC, De Clercq D. Initial foot contact and related kinematics affect impact loading rate in running. *J Sports Sci.* 2016; 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2016.1225970> PMID: 27624557
7. van der Worp H, Vrielink JW, Bredeweg SW. Do runners who suffer injuries have higher vertical ground reaction forces than those who remain injury-free? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Br J Sports Med.* 2016; 50: 450–457. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2015-094924> PMID: 26729857
8. Lyght M, Nockerts M, Kernozek TW, Ragan R. Effects of Foot Strike and Step Frequency on Achilles Tendon Stress During Running. *J Appl Biomech.* 2016; 32: 365–372. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jab.2015-0183> PMID: 26955843
9. Cheung RTH, Wong RYL, Chung TKW, Choi RT, Leung WWY, Shek DHY. Relationship between foot strike pattern, running speed, and footwear condition in recreational distance runners. *Sports Biomech.* 2016; 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14763141.2016.1226381> PMID: 27593384
10. Cavanagh PR, LaFortune MA. Ground reaction forces in distance running. *J Biomech.* 1980; 13: 397–406. PMID: 7400169
11. Altman AR, Davis IS. A kinematic method for footstrike pattern detection in barefoot and shod runners. *Gait Posture.* 2012; 35: 298–300. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gaitpost.2011.09.104> PMID: 22075193
12. Clermont CA, Barden JM. Accelerometer-based determination of gait variability in older adults with knee osteoarthritis. *Gait Posture.* 2016; 50: 126–130. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gaitpost.2016.08.024> PMID: 27607303
13. Hsu C-Y, Tsai Y-S, Yau C-S, Shie H-H, Wu C-M. Test-Retest Reliability of an Automated Infrared-Assisted Trunk Accelerometer-Based Gait Analysis System. *Sensors.* 2016; 16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/s16081156> PMID: 27455281
14. Cheung RTH, Davis IS. Landing Pattern Modification to Improve Patellofemoral Pain in Runners: A Case Series. *J Orthop Sports Phys Ther.* 2011; 41: 914–919. <https://doi.org/10.2519/jospt.2011.3771> PMID: 22031595
15. Davis IS, Futrell E. Gait Retraining: Altering the Fingerprint of Gait. *Phys Med Rehabil Clin N Am.* 2016; 27: 339–355. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmr.2015.09.002> PMID: 26616188
16. Chen TL, An WW, Chan ZYS, Au IPH, Zhang ZH, Cheung RTH. Immediate effects of modified landing pattern on a probabilistic tibial stress fracture model in runners. *Clin Biomech Bristol Avon.* 2016; 33: 49–54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clinbiomech.2016.02.013> PMID: 26945721
17. Zhang JH, An WW, Au IPH, Chen TL, Cheung RTH. Comparison of the correlations between impact loading rates and peak accelerations measured at two different body sites: Intra- and inter-subject analysis. *Gait Posture.* 2016; 46: 53–56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gaitpost.2016.02.002> PMID: 27131177
18. Cheung RTH, Davis IS. Landing Pattern Modification to Improve Patellofemoral Pain in Runners: A Case Series. *J Orthop Sports Phys Ther.* 2011; 41: 914–919. <https://doi.org/10.2519/jospt.2011.3771> PMID: 22031595

19. Eskofier BM, Musho E, Schlarb H. Pattern classification of foot strike type using body worn accelerometers. 2013 IEEE International Conference on Body Sensor Networks (BSN). 2013. pp. 1–4. 10.1109/BSN.2013.6575457
20. An W, Rainbow MJ, Cheung RTH. Effects of Surface Inclination on the Vertical Loading Rates and Landing Pattern during the First Attempt of Barefoot Running in Habitual Shod Runners. *BioMed Res Int*. 2015; 2015: 240153. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2015/240153> PMID: 26258133
21. Agresta C, Brown A. Gait Retraining for Injured and Healthy Runners Using Augmented Feedback: A Systematic Literature Review. *J Orthop Sports Phys Ther*. 2015; 45: 576–584. <https://doi.org/10.2519/jospt.2015.5823> PMID: 26158882
22. Tseh W, Caputo JL, Morgan DW. Influence of gait manipulation on running economy in female distance runners. *J Sports Sci Med*. 2007; 7: 91–95.