



Why £250 Masai 'super trainers' WON'T put an extra spring in your step... and shoes' red-faced makers funded study that proves it

- Study shows the MBT shoes have no benefits for sufferers of back pain
- In fact, in some cases can make problems worse for the wearer
- The research was funded by the company behind the footwear
- The shoes have a curved 'rocker' sole which is said to mimic the effect of walking without footwear on soft sand or grass

By SANCHEZ MANNING

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They are the £250 trainers that have won a host of celebrity fans, convinced by promises that they improve posture and reduce back pain.

But now a scientific study has shown that the MBT shoes favoured by stars such as Madonna, Paris Hilton and Gwyneth Paltrow have no benefits for sufferers of lower back pain – and in some cases can make problems worse.

The findings will be especially embarrassing for the company behind the footwear – because it funded the research.

MBT stands for Masai Barefoot Technology and the shoes have a curved 'rocker' sole which is said to mimic the effect of walking without footwear on soft sand or grass.

Despite their chunky appearance, manufacturers say their health benefits include improving balance and increasing muscle activity.

But almost two decades after they were launched in 1996, scientists have discovered that they are no better for people with lower back pain than traditional sports shoes.

The damning report states: 'Rocker sole footwear has been marketed with persuasive advertising suggesting that use of this footwear leads to a reduction in low back pain.'



'Manufacturers claim that the unstable curved sole can positively influence mechanisms associated with chronic lower back pain, such as poor balance, sub-standard muscle function [and] poor posture.

'However, there is no evidence in the literature supporting these claims.'

Researchers at King's College London, Hertfordshire University and two London hospitals recruited 115 people who suffer from chronic lower back pain to wear either a rocker sole shoe or a standard trainer for at least two hours each day while standing and walking. After assessing the participants, the scientists concluded:

Rocker sole shoes appear to be no more beneficial than flat sole shoes in reducing pain in people with chronic lower back problems.

If a person's lower back pain is predominately aggravated by standing or walking, it may be more beneficial to wear a flat-sole shoe.

Those given flat-soled shoes were more satisfied with their trainers than those given MBTs.

The findings, which are due to be published in the journal Spine in October, will add to the woes of MBT, coming just 18 months after the Swiss parent company filed for bankruptcy. Abel Galindo Muniz, from MBT's medical academy, challenged the report's findings, saying that hundreds of thousands of customers had reported that their back pain had been helped by the use of the shoes.

He said: 'There are many studies published in medical journals showing the benefits in balance, posture, muscle activation, blood circulation and impact absorption.'

He added: 'We always say in our claims that it "may" help lower back pain. Like all health and fitness tools, for many people it does help and for some it does not.'

Other famous names said to wear MBTs include Jodie Kidd, Heidi Klum, Sadie Frost, Jemima Khan and actress Mischa Barton.