1 TERRA PLANA EVO
With a 4 millimeter (mm) outsole and no midsole, these 8-ouncers offer minimal support, like the Vibram Five Fingers. However, their more conservative design doesn't scream ninja-in-training. *$160, terraplana.com*

2 NIKE FREE 5.0
The 8.2-ounce Free's foam midsole, which is 20 mm thick at the heel and 10 mm thick at the forefoot, provides moderate support. But strategically placed grooves make it superflexible. It's an ideal first step in the transition to minimalism. *$85, nikestore.com*

3 VIBRAM FIVEFINGERS BIKILA
These 6-ounce foot gloves have a barely there 4 mm outsole and no midsole, so they replicate the barefoot experience more closely than any other shoes. Wear them with Injinji five-finger socks if you need a bit more comfort. *$100, vibramfivefingers.com*

4 MIZUNO WAVE RONIN 2
The midsole of a regular running shoe is about 30 mm thick in the heel. This 8-ounce shoe's midsole is half as chunky, which makes it a good choice for people who can't give up cushioning completely. *$95, mizunousa.com*

improved stability," says Dicharry. But don't toss your current kicks and jump into a pair of Vibram Five-Fingers without first testing your wheels: Close your eyes and stand barefoot on one leg for 30 seconds. Repeat with the other leg. If either foot rolls outward, it's too weak to train in barefoot shoes. The best way to improve: Balance on each leg for 30 seconds, 15 times a day.

Q WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BAREFOOT-STYLE SHOES? J.D., DARIEN, CT

They provide the potential for greater explosiveness, improved coordination, and less musculoskeletal pain, says Jay Dicharry, M.P.T., C.S.C.S., director of the University of Virginia's motion analysis lab and center for endurance sport. Here's why: Because they have thin and flexible soles, barefoot-style shoes boost proprioception, which is the feedback that travels from your feet to your brain with every step. And the more data you deliver to your brain, the more efficiently and powerfully the brain's signals can move your body. "Your muscles fire faster and you have