

Ladies, they're everywhere! Those fabulous heels that make you look great. What they don't tell you is that those extremely high heeled and narrow-toed shoes can lead to foot, ankle, knee, hip, and back problems.

Even though the tendency to develop bunions is inherited, women are affected far more than men. This is mostly because women's footwear tends to be harsh on the feet and the body.

Government statistics say that about 4.4 million people report having bunions in a given year. A bunion is an enlargement at the base of the big toe, an unsightly bump out to the side caused by a misalignment of the joint, says the American Podiatric Medical Association. As the condition worsens, the big toe may angle toward the second toe or even move all the way under it. The damaged joints are subject to bursitis or arthritis. Bunions can also inhibit mobility and have a negative impact on your walking.

If you notice back pain when you are wearing your heels, that is because high heels usually increase the curve in the lower back, which will push the lower back out of a neutral position. This excessive curve or arch in the back can cause compression and pain as well as increased strain to the hips and knees. Women who wear high heels are also at a higher risk for ankle sprains.

So what can you do to help prevent these complications from occurring? Practice proper posture and body mechanics as well as be selective with your footwear; comfort is more important than fashion. If you already have some of the above symptoms, physical therapy can help. A physical therapist can perform a detailed evaluation on the patient which will include studying the patient's posture and positioning as well as their gait pattern. Then a plan of care will be properly selected, which may consist of manual therapy (joint/soft tissue mobilizations and manipulations), taping techniques, stretching, therapeutic exercises for both strength and mobility, and anti-inflammatory modalities. In addition, postural awareness will be addressed with the patient. Orthotics can be discussed if appropriate and proper shoe types will also be addressed.

So be sweet to your feet. Trade in those expensive Italian high heels for a pair of foot friendly shoes. Remember, you should not have to break your shoes in, they should always be comfortable!

Information retrieved from:

"Cruel shoes" by Victoria Clayton, Today in PT. "Bunion surgery can ease pain, but it's no quick fix" by Karen S. Peterson, USA Today.

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