

[<< Back](#)



Trying to reach new heights? Rethinking high heels

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You can't even walk without wobbling in those heels, but you had to have them. Indeed, many women choose to endure pain and discomfort in the name of fashion ... and underestimate the health risks of high-heeled shoes.

Face it. Feet aren't meant to be propped in stilettos. Heels over two inches affect the natural way you walk. A heel higher than three inches puts seven times the pressure on the ball of your foot and can harm the bones.

Heels aren't just impractical when you're running to catch a bus. Shoes with high heels can lead to ankle sprains, knee and back problems and injuries from falls. Add to that a host of other foot ailments - from blisters to heel pain to deformities.

Yet, according to a study by the American Podiatric Medical Association, 39 percent of women wear high heels every day. And within this group, nearly three out of four reported having a shoe-related foot problem.

The price of glamour

It's true that stylish high heels can make you look taller, flatter your legs and give you a chic appearance. But they also are notorious for harming women's feet.

- **Blisters, corns or calluses** can develop when high heels throw weight into the ball of your foot.
- **Lower back pain** can result when your spine bends backwards to compensate the forward push of your body when you walk in heels.
- **Pain in the ball of your foot**, a condition called metatarsalgia, can stem from high heels.
- **Ankle sprains** are more likely because your foot position in heels and the often-narrow heel width can make ankles unstable.
- **Achilles tendinitis** is a risk. Frequent wearing of heels shortens and tightens calf muscles. This can lead to painful inflammation of the Achilles tendon at the back of your heel.
- **Benign tumors of nerves**, called neuromas, can grow between toes. Symptoms may include sharp pain and tingling or numbness of the toes.
- **"Pump bump,"** or Hagland's deformity, has been linked to women who often wear high heels. This painful bump on the back of the heel bone occurs when the bone rubs against the shoe or a narrow, pointed shoe makes toes curl up.

Wearing heels all the time can even make wearing flats impossible if your foot becomes used to the position of heels. This can lead to more serious problems, like bone spurs or Achilles tendon tears.

Boots that are made for walking

Give up high heels?! If you can't imagine life without your favorite accessory, just make adjustments. Fashion and comfort don't have to be at odds.

- Mix in flats and low pumps to your daily shoe wardrobe. Save your high heels for special occasions.
- Wear flats for walking distances. You can bring your heels to change into once you get to where you're going.
- Take smaller steps in high heels. Put your heel down first and try to glide to minimize damage to feet.
- Try to buy short, chunky heels with plenty of room for your toes. Lower heels usually give you more stability, better shock absorption and greater comfort.
- Avoid wearing backless heels for any length of time because they strain your muscles. A strap or laces over the instep will also keep feet from sliding forward.
- Stretch your calf, heel and foot muscles to help them relax and increase range of movement. Treat them to a soak or massage at day's end.

Lastly, if you suffer foot or ankle pain, see a doctor. Foot problems are harder to treat once they become chronic.

View the original [Trying to reach new heights? Rethinking high heels](#) article on myOptumHealth.com

SOURCES:

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