

FACT OR FICTION

DO HIGH HEELS REALLY CAUSE BACK PAIN?



Most women recognize that high heels are not particularly good for their feet, and they don't deny that they are uncomfortable. However, despite the crusade that doctors have waged against this pointy culprit, women continue to wear them.

According to the American Podiatric Medical Association, "39% of women wear high heels daily." Even more astonishing, according to the same study, 42% of women knowingly wear uncomfortable shoes, and of those, 73% had shoe-related foot ailments.

High heels or stilettos, as they are often called, are generally worn for style, not comfort. Nevertheless, despite what women are willing to tolerate in the name of fashion, the fact remains that there is more damage being done beyond just having sore feet at the end of the day.

In an article done by the American Chiropractic Association entitled, *Today's Fashion Can Be Tomorrow's Pain*, ACA president, Dr. Richard Brassard commented saying, "Sometimes I see a woman walking down the street with high heels and a two-ton bag, and I want to stop her and make her aware of what she is doing to her body."

In the ACA article, Dr. Brassard compares the musculoskeletal system to a "mobile, hanging in dynamic equilibrium, each part balancing the other. If one part becomes 'fixed,' the whole system will compensate with a movement or restriction."

Thus, wearing high heels for any length of time augments the normal forward curvature of the back, causing the pelvis to tilt forward, which makes it difficult for the body to maintain a center of gravity. Dr. Brassard's findings prove that high heels are not only bad for your feet, but they are also a detriment to your back, your posture, and your balance.

COMMON AILMENTS CAUSED BY HIGH HEELS ARE:

- Sharp pains in the lower back
- Bunions, hammer toes, calluses
- Shooting pain in the toes
- Bruised arches
- Shoulder and neck pain due to poor posture
- Swelling in the knees
- Shortened calf muscles



For all the pain it costs to wear high heels why do women continue to do it? The answer is simple; beauty. Amanda Jackson, a 40-year-old married, mother of three calls high heels “a necessity.”

“Yeah, they hurt, but heels are like a ‘necessary evil!’ Men like them, and they make my legs look good without as much pain as surgery,” she said.

Seemingly, women at any age are willing to risk a lot for the price of beauty. However, while most stiletto-wearing gals are not willing to abandon their high pumps, many are willing to make some adjustments.



HERE ARE A FEW SUGGESTIONS FROM THE AMERICAN CHIROPRACTIC ASSOCIATION

- Choose comfortable shoes. If you must wear high heels, bring a pair of flat shoes along with you to change into should you become uncomfortable. If you walk to work, wear flat shoes and change into your more fashionable shoes when you arrive to alleviate any pain or discomfort.
- If the shoe is uncomfortable while standing, chances are it will not be any more comfortable while walking. The wrong shoe can affect the body’s center of gravity.
- Choose supportive shoes. Designer spikes or nonsupportive loafers may look nice but do not allow for easy, symmetrical walking.
- While sitting, whether or not you are wearing heels, it is important to take frequent stretch breaks to alleviate atrophy of the hamstring muscle.
- Think about your daily tasks. If your clothes affect your movements, consider outfits that fit your lifestyle.

From the de Medici heel in the 16th century to the Manolos of today, high heels may be more painful than ever, but they are here to stay. Despite the obvious hazards, doctors have yet to persuade women not to wear high heels. So, if you must, if they are indeed a “necessity,” the ACA puts it best by saying:

“Designers and stylists tend to be more concerned about the way something looks rather than the way it feels. Listen to your body. One of the most important aspects of being in style and looking your best is to maintain healthy judgement.