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PUTTING YOUR FOOT DOWN

STEPPING UP THE FIGHT AGAINST FOOT PAIN

by Blythe Thimsen

UTTER THE PHRASE “sensible shoes” around some women, and they may respond with “Please don’t use such foul language around me,” or “I’m sorry, I don’t understand what you mean?”

As the new strappy sandal styles of spring hit the shelves, it leaves women everywhere asking that age-old question: is it possible to find sensible, yet sexy shoes? How about supportive, yet not matronly? For years these seemed to be some of the greatest mysteries of life – and oftentimes with disappointing answers. Shoe designers have heard the cry, and now many retailers, including The Walk Shoppe, which is connected to the Spokane Foot & Ankle Clinic on Spokane’s South Hill, are determined to offer new and improved answers. Offering a wide assortment of fashionable and comfortable shoes, retailers are redefining “sensible shoes,” one step at a time, and have picked up on the demand for attractive shoes that cater to comfort. And it shouldn’t be any surprise the demand for comfort with style is on the rise, considering how much stress, strain and trauma our feet incur, paired with the fashion standards



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According to the American Podiatric Medical Association, "Feet endure tremendous pressures of daily living. An average day of walking brings a force equal to several hundred tons on them. They are subject to more injury than any other part of the body, underscoring the need to protect them with proper footwear."

What are some of those injuries? According to the U.S. National Library of Medicine, the following are some of the most common foot problems:

Bunions - When your big toe points toward the second toe. This causes a bump on the outside edge of your toe. Bunions occur more commonly in women and can sometimes run in families. People born with abnormal bones in their feet are more likely to form a bunion. Wearing narrow-toed, high-heeled shoes may lead to the development of a bunion. The condition may become painful as extra bone and a fluid-filled sac grow at the base of the big toe.

Corns and Calluses - Corns and calluses are caused by pressure or friction on skin. A corn is thickened skin on the top or side of a toe, usually from shoes that do not fit properly. A callus is thickened skin on your heels or the soles of your feet. The thickening of the skin is a protective reaction. For example, farmers and rowers

get callused hands that prevent them from getting painful blisters. People with bunions often develop a callus over the bunion because it rubs against the shoe.

Morton's Neuroma - Morton's neuroma is an injury to the nerve between the toes, which causes thickening and pain. It commonly affects the nerve that travels between the third and fourth toes.

Morton's neuroma is more common in women than men. The exact cause is unknown; however, some experts believe the following may play a role in the development of this condition: Abnormal positioning of toes, flat feet, forefoot problems, high foot arches, tight shoes and high heels.

Ingrown Toenails - An ingrown toenail occurs when the edge of the nail grows down and into the skin of the toe. There may be pain, redness and swelling around the nail. An ingrown toenail can result from a number of things, but poorly fitting shoes, and toenails that are not trimmed properly are the most common causes. The skin along the edge of a toenail may become red and infected. The great toe is usually affected, but any toenail can become ingrown. Ingrown toenails may occur when extra pressure is placed on your toe. Most commonly, this pressure is caused by shoes that are too tight or too loose. If you walk often or participate in athletics, a shoe that is even a little tight can cause this problem. Some deformities of

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the foot or toes can also place extra pressure on the toe.

Hammertoes - A hammertoe is a deformity of the second, third or fourth toes. In this condition, the toe is bent at the middle joint, so that it resembles a hammer. Initially, hammertoes are flexible and can be corrected with simple measures, but if left untreated, they can become fixed and require surgery.

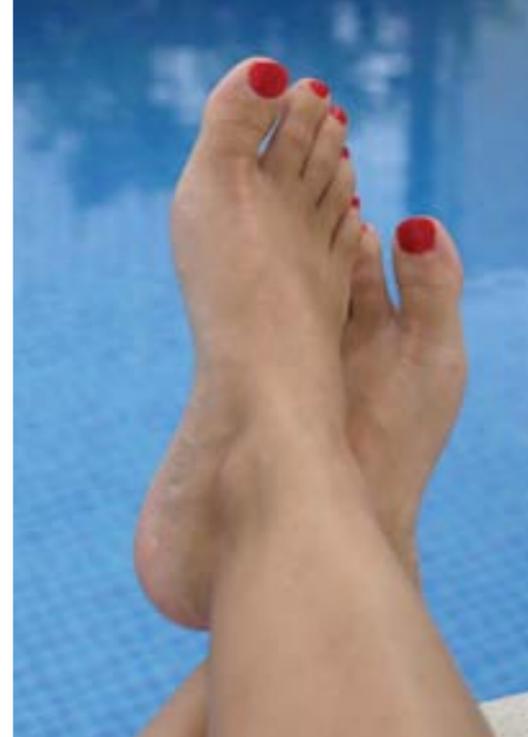
Though not all, *many* of the above problems can be aggravated by wearing shoes that are too tight, or heels that are too high. A study by the American Podiatric Medical Association showed that 39 percent of women wear high heels daily. This is down from the 60 percent who wore high heels back in 1986. This same study showed that 42 percent of women would wear uncomfortable shoes despite pain, and that 73 percent had shoe-related foot problems.

Heels can be a woman's best friend because of the sexy look they create, but they can also hurt like crazy! Remember the ladies from the 1980s that would walk down the street wearing their corporate power suits, dark nylons and a pair of white Reeboks? Is it time for those days to return, or are there steps that can be taken to proactively care for your feet?

Podiatrist Dr. Borys Markewych, who owns Spokane Foot & Ankle Clinic, offers the following advice on foot care. "Your shoes and feet aren't supposed to hurt," he says, dispelling the myth that painful feet are an acceptable price for beauty. "It is better to deal with any problems earlier" before it escalates into a more serious condition.

"Our structures get old, worn down and experience micro trauma," he explains. As our bodies grow and change, so too does the shape of the foot. Just as you would not continue to stuff your body into the same size clothing you wore while 20 pounds lighter, you should not cram your foot into a shoe size you may have worn once, but which no longer fits. With changes in the foot size and amount of padding on the bottom of the foot, often come changes in tolerance for sky-high heels. That doesn't necessarily mean a life sentence of ballet flats, though.

"Two inches seems to be the magic number," says Markewych of the ideal height for a heel. If a heel is any higher, weight is put on the ball of the foot, which causes pain and possibly damage.



Markewych says that though every person and every foot is different, it is universally important to ensure that a shoe is wide enough at the ball of the foot. In addition to the ball of the foot, the fit in the heel is important. If you have a narrow heel, that often makes it difficult for the shoe to properly fit, which can lead to a sloppy fit, and risk of the shoe moving around.

Though heels may often be narrow, the scope of trouble they can cause is wide. Heel pain is one of the most common complaints of anyone with foot pain. According to the American Podiatric Medical Association, "Heel pain has many causes. It is generally the result of faulty biomechanics (walking gait abnormalities) that place too much stress on the heel bone and the soft tissues that attach to it. The stress may also result from injury, or a bruise incurred while walking, running or jumping on hard surfaces; wearing poorly constructed footwear or being overweight."

When it comes to reducing and eliminating foot pain and the risk of more developed foot problems, the best options are to seek "a combination of both proper fitting shoes and using inserts to prevent pathology (surgical correction) in the future," says Markewych. All in all, that's good advice to follow because, when it comes down to it, don't we all want to look good and feel good – from our nose, to the tips of our toes?! **S**



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