



HAPPY FEET

The importance of keeping comfort in mind when you select your footwear

By: [DR. DAWN GROSSER]

Winter is over, thankfully, and our Corpus spring/summer is here. It's time to dust off the sandals and open-toed shoes and let our feet enjoy the breeze. Some of us have shoes that have already seen many a summer (ones well worn in and ready to go), while others of us prefer only the newest fashion each season and are ready for our 2014 debut. And some of us have numerous flip-flops for every occasion.

But for those of us with painful feet, many of the shoes in our closet don't work any more or only work for very short periods of time. Still, we hang on, hoping desperately we will be able to wear them again one day.

As a foot and ankle orthopedic surgeon, I see all sizes of feet and all sorts of problems. Most of the time, shoes are both the culprit and the cure for many issues. Daily, I treat women in my practice with painful bunions. Shoes with a pointed toe region

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(called the toe box) usually exert a constant inward pressure on the foot. If this stress continues over any length of time, bunions can form on the big toe and bunionettes (also called tailor's bunions) can form on the small toe.

Furthermore, the height of the heel can increase the pressure on all of the toes and in the ball of the foot. The higher the heel, the higher the pressure.

The stress of the shoe pushing against the toes can lead to hammer toes, claw toes and painful callouses on the ball of the foot. Ouch! The biggest culprit: the stiletto and all variations thereof.

Stilettoes were developed in the post-war 1950s by French designer Roger Vivier, who clearly did not have to wear them. The word, "stiletto," stems from the Latin "stilus," meaning "stake." The heel was made with a steel rod enclosed in a wooden or plastic material. This causes the wearer to walk more on her toes – a position that makes the calves appear more shapely and elongated and emphasizes the buttocks. It also makes the feet appear smaller than they actually are – all of which can be a desirable look.

Unfortunately, the price we pay is often deformed feet from years of wearing shoes too high and too narrow in the toe box. High heels are Western society's form of the foot binding so often criticized in the Chinese culture.

In China, the tradition of foot binding typically began with girls ages 5 to 7, and it continued for two years binding the heel toward the toes and raising the arch to create a lotus leaf appearance of the foot. The ideal foot length was 3 inches. Small feet were desirable, and they commanded a high bride price.

This practice was banned in 1949 – just about the time the stiletto was introduced in the West.

So, a few words of advice as you gaze into your closet and decide which style of shoe to adorn your feet with today:

- 1 Choose comfort over fashion for a long day on your feet.
- 2 Make sure you have your feet measured each year, as most feet increase in size and the size you're choosing may be too small.
- 3 Get rid of shoes that hurt you to wear and even old tennis shoes you "only mow the lawn in." The cushion and support are gone, so you may start developing other problems like plantar fasciitis, tendonitis and even stress fractures.
- 4 Look for roomy toe boxes. You know how your feet look when you're barefoot? Choose shoes that most closely allow this natural spread.
- 5 Go shopping intentionally to find a pair of shoes you like, but that also feel good. Be willing to spend time and money picking out the next pair of shoes. A good pair of shoes is worth it and may help you avoid painful problems that can be hard to resolve.

Thankfully, not all "good for you" shoes are ugly. In Corpus, we're lucky to have a few shoe stores geared for comfort and fashion combined. I often suggest William's Fashion-Shoes, Julian Gold, Functional Foot Fitness, Dillard's (the comfort shoe area) and Fleet Feet Sports. Online shoes at Zappos.com or 6pm.com can also be good, but you have to know a little bit about the styles that are comfortable to your feet.

Some other brands that have comfort in mind include Josef Seibel, Dansko, Pas de Rouge, Naot, ECCO, Finn Comfort, Mephisto, Sofft, Gentle Souls, Kork-Ease, Helle Comfort, Arcopedico, FLY London, FitFlops and OluKai flip-flops. This is a start.



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