

a healthier you

The Lowdown on High Heels: What Your Feet are Telling You

You've seen them in every fashion magazine and on all your favorite celebrities — high, high heels. While they may look great, high heels offer little support, and many foot complaints are caused or aggravated by this type of footwear.

These shoes force your feet down into a toe box that is often too tight or too narrow, causing the toes to be squeezed together, and explaining the high incidence of painful conditions like bunions and hammertoes among women. But there's no reason your feet should be fashion victims — read on, and learn how to recognize, treat and prevent these conditions.

What is a Bunion?

A bunion is an enlargement of the joint at the base of the big toe that forms when the bone or tissue at the big toe joint moves out of place. This forces the toe to bend toward the others, causing an often painful lump of bone on the foot. Since this joint carries a lot of the body's weight while walking, bunions can cause extreme pain if left untreated. The joint itself may become stiff and sore, making wearing shoes difficult. Bunion symptoms include:

- Development of a firm bump on the outside edge of the foot, at the base of the big toe
- Redness, swelling or pain at or near the joint
- Corns or other irritations caused by the overlap of the first and second toes
- Restricted or painful motion of the big toe

What is a Hammertoe?

A hammertoe is a bending of the toe at the first joint. This bending causes the toe to appear like an upside-down "V" when looked at from the side. Any toe can be involved, but the condition usually affects the second through fifth toes. Hammertoe symptoms include:

- Pain upon pressure at the top of the bent toe from footwear
- Formation of corns on the top of the joint
- Redness and swelling at the joint
- Restricted or painful motion of the toe joint
- Pain in the ball of the foot at the base of the affected toe

What can you do for relief?

You can do your part to relieve the discomfort of bunions and hammertoes by following these guidelines:

- Wear shoes with a wide and deep toe box.
- Always fit your larger foot, and have your feet sized each time you purchase shoes.
- Avoid high-heeled shoes over two inches tall.
- If your bunion or hammertoe becomes inflamed and painful, apply ice packs several times a day to reduce swelling.

Treatment

The primary goal of early treatment options is to relieve pressure on the bunion or hammertoe, and halt the progression of the joint deformity. Conservative treatment methods include padding, taping, anti-inflammatory drugs, cortisone injections, physical therapy and foot orthotics.

When conservative treatments fail, or the condition progresses beyond these options, surgery can remove or correct the bony abnormality, restore normal joint alignment and relieve pain. Surgery can often be performed on an outpatient basis, using local anesthesia.

If you suffer from bunions or hammertoes, seek medical attention as soon as

possible. The longer these conditions are left untreated, the less likely non-surgical treatments will work to relieve your discomfort.

Shoe Buying Tips for Healthy Feet

- Always shop for shoes in the afternoon or evening, because feet tend to swell throughout the day.
- Choose a shoe with no more than a three-inch heel.
- Look for wedges, platforms or thick heels, as well as a firm back or straps to keep your foot secure.
- Don't buy shoes that don't fit—even if you love them and they're on sale. These "bargains" can be very costly in the long run because of the problems they'll cause. Get the size that fits.

Foot Pain is NOT Normal

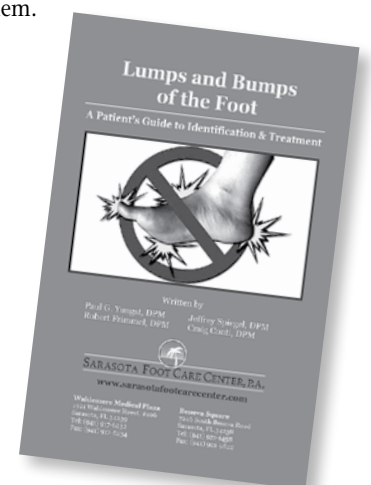
At the first sign of pain, or any noticeable changes in your feet, seek professional care from a podiatrist. Your feet need to last a lifetime, and regular foot care can make sure they're up to the task. With proper detection and care, most foot and ankle problems can be reduced or prevented. ☺

SOURCE: The doctors of Sarasota Foot Care Center. Drs. Jeffrey Spiegel, Paul Yungst, Robert Frimmel and Craig Conti are dedicated to curing your foot and ankle pain. For more information, or to make an appointment, please call (941) 917-6232 or visit www.sarasotafoot-carecenter.com.



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