

LOVE HEELS?

Then you need to read this...

In a *Sex and the City* episode, Carrie tells Charlotte how she tried the trapeze. Charlotte says she could never do that as she has a terrible fear of heights, to which Carrie quips: "Well, I do not. You've seen my shoes."

High heel shoes may be a must-have fashion item, but wearing them comes at a price. Apart from incredible discomfort, how much damage can a night out in heels do? And is there a way to save our health without forgoing the height?

Height hazards

Regularly wearing high heels increases the pressure placed on the inside of the knee. And the higher the heel, the more potential for damage. The repercussions? Possibly osteoarthritis (the wear-and-tear type of arthritis that causes knee pain). Even chunky heels do damage. While they do place less pressure on the knee, the broader heel is easier and more comfortable to wear, so they're often worn for longer periods of time.

According to podiatrist Andrew Bull, other long-term effects suffered by high-heel devotees include bunions (bony growths on the inside of your big toe); varicose veins (as calf muscles are under constant tension, which can inhibit blood flow); toenail problems; and bad calluses (thick, hardened skin that burns when walked on).

Wear them wisely


So if you're still going to wear them – don't worry, we all do – just do so in a way that will cause the minimal amount of damage. Here's how ...

Everything in moderation

"Keep heels for special occasions," says Bull. Thongs are now accepted as cool and chic – so give them a try.

Wiggle it When in heels, take shorter strides so you put your heel down before your forefoot. It will decrease your chances of pulling a leg muscle.

Change 'em Wearing the same type of heel two days in a row is bad for feet as you put pressure in the same places, increasing the risk of corns and calluses.



ROXY HOPED NO ONE HAD NOTICED THAT HER LEFT SHOE DIDN'T FIT QUITE AS WELL AS THE RIGHT ...

Shift your weight On long nights out, try not to put all your weight forward on the balls of your feet. Rather, stand with one leg bent. And if you have to stand in heels at work, kick them off as soon as you sit down and have a good stretch.

Trainer swap Wear sneakers to and from the office to save your calves, and swap them for heels

at your desk. This way, your shoes will last longer, too.

Stretch your calves After a heavy stiletto session, stretch out your calves and lower back.

Buy right Many women buy shoes too small, making potential problems even worse. Feet swell throughout the day so buy shoes in the afternoon for a better fit.

Support it Always opt for a shoe that has the heel positioned right beneath your heel. It will stop you putting extra pressure on the balls of your feet.

The gift of the gel "New gel cushions are a godsend because they offer comfort for the balls of your feet," says Bull. Try Scholl Party Feet Gel Cushions, \$9.95, available from chemists, shoe, department and grocery stores and Sportsgirl stores nationally.

Donna Jones **COSMO**

TRY THE FOLLOWING EXERCISES TO ...

... Strengthen

To get a strong set of calves, first stand on the floor or hang your heels off a step. Raise up on your toes slowly, then lower and repeat. Or, do this at your desk by placing a heavy book on your lap and repeating the above step eight to 15 times.

... Stretch

To prevent the shortening of your calf muscles, you need to stretch thoroughly and regularly. To do this, drop one of your heels off a step and hold the stretch for 10 to 30 seconds. Then repeat on the other side.

... Prevent injury

To strengthen ankles and help prevent high-heel related injuries, try this simple exercise: squat with your back against the wall, your legs at a right angle, and hold for as long as you can. Next, squat and pulse up and down 10 times.