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Curse of killer heels

HIGH RISK: Unsuitable footwear puts excess pressure on the ball of the foot. Below: Victoria Beckham's shoes



MARY GOLD looks at remedies to combat the damage caused by stilettos

It's estimated that during our lifetime we walk the equivalent of the Earth's circumference every 10 years. So it's perhaps inevitable that the 26 bones and 33 joints in each of our feet take a real pounding.

Given that our entire body weight is absorbed across quite a small area in each step, rising to as much as three-and-a-half times our weight when running, it is hardly surprising that feet are susceptible to injury. With more women wearing higher heels and for longer, some experts are becoming increasingly concerned about the long-term damage being inflicted on feet.

Photographs of Victoria Beckham's feet are shocking. It may be that her bunions are hereditary but wearing six-inch heels regularly can't be good for you, can it?

Foot expert Tony Andrews has been working with problem feet for 30 years. Clients at his bespoke footwear shop in London's West End include sportsmen, celebrities, MPs and royalty. He says foot problems are common but reveals that many people refuse to admit to them or change their ways.

"I see people with dreadful feet and they come in wearing totally unsuitable shoes," he said. "I ask why they didn't stop wearing those shoes years ago and the answer, of course, is always fashion."

If you wear sensible shoes, Mr



Andrews said, you walk in a 'heel and toe' style. All that alters when you wear high heels because your weight transfers to the ball of the foot, creating problems from hammer toes and bunions to irreversible damage to leg tendons. Because so many areas are under strain, the injuries can radiate out to the base of the spine, causing sciatica and even headaches.

High heels date back to Egyptian times but the stiletto heel became fashionable in the Thirties. Women wore them for special occasions only but now one in 10 women

being fair to your feet. People don't realise what a delicate structure the foot is.

So what can you do? Well, the first and most important thing is to see an expert if you are in agony. You can also consider orthotics, inserts and insoles that fit inside the shoe to give the whole foot better support. These need to be tailor-made because all feet are different and if your problem persists you will need a bespoke shoe liner or even a bespoke shoe. Mr Andrews makes them for £1,500.

If your budget does not stretch that far, choose a thicker heel, as this will spread the load more evenly. Wear soft insoles to reduce the impact on your knees and make sure your shoes fit snugly so the foot does not slide forward, because that puts even more pressure on the toes.

For a cheaper option than bespoke shoes, bunion sufferers could try Hallux footwear, which include a subtly concealed soft pouch inside the shoe. This eases the pain while cushioning and dramatically reducing the appearance of the bunion.

Preserve

Caroline James, 34, bought Hallux sandals after becoming embarrassed about her bunions showing when she wore summer shoes. "Instead of the bunion sticking out, it is covered and supported so it looks and feels much better," she said.

Foot problems, however, are not the sole preserve of women in high heels. Kate Mills, a Birmingham-based podiatrist, says an increasing number of men are seeking help for their troublesome feet.

"Men are taking better care of themselves these days and that extends to their feet, especially with sports injuries or discomfort from ill-fitting shoes," she said.

She believes what you do for a living also affects the health of your feet. Post deliverers, teachers, nurses and waiting-on staff, all of whom work on their feet and whose footwear may not be appropriate or well-fitting, often suffer painful feet.

Her best advice is to wear heels only for evenings or special occasions, to make sure they have an ankle strap and that the "toe box" is wide and deep enough.

You should alternate your footwear every day to air the shoes and wear heels only for a short period.

Tailor-made insoles (those orthotics again) will probably help but, she says, if all else fails your joints may need to be manipulated.

or a programme of specialist acupuncture arranged to relieve severe pain in your feet.

INFORMATION:
 ● Tony Andrews: 0207 486 4864
 www.orthotics-online.com
 ● Hallux sandals: 0845 602 2868/
 www.meanfeet.co.uk

'I ask why they didn't stop wearing those shoes years ago and the answer, of course, is always fashion'

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