

Do You Have High Heel Feet?

By Lisa Kovalovich

Keep your feet healthy.

Sure, spindly, sexy heels are always in style, but wearing them day after day can result in a painful condition known as "high heel feet." According to New York podiatrist Oliver Zong, MD, the high heel foot is one that has begun to take the shape of a high heel shoe. "High heels can cause bunions, where the big toe points toward the little toes; bunionettes, or bunions on the pinky toe; and hammertoes, which are crooked and don't lie flat," explains Dr. Zong. Not only do these deformities look bad, they can eventually cause pain and make walking difficult. If you're a high heel lover, there are some things you can do to avoid high heel foot:

Choose heels with squared-off, not pointy, toes. Squared-off shoes offer more room for toes. Try Nine West's funky Alma shoe, \$69. If you just can't part with pointy-toed styles, Dr. Zong suggests finding pairs where the toe begins to taper to its point beyond where your toes end within the shoe. That way, your toes can still lie flat inside the shoe.

Get measured. Your shoe size can change, so it's wise to have your feet measured every time you shop for shoes. Tip: You'll get the best results if you measure your foot while you're standing, since the foot spreads out when we put weight on it.

Forget the break-in period. "Shoes should be immediately comfortable," says Dr. Zong. If they hurt when you try them on in the store, leave them there; they'll only get more uncomfortable as you wear them.

See your doctor if pain becomes a problem. While many women live with mild bunions, bunionettes, and hammertoes, these conditions can become worse with time and create a lot of pain. "If there's pain involved, surgery may be your best option for relief," says Dr. Zong. The great news is that corrective foot surgery is generally quick (from half an hour to two hours), recovery time is minimal (most women walk home the day of foot surgery), and the procedure is covered by most insurance.