

SAVE THE STILETTOS FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Sure they look sexy, but high heels are one of the main reasons women have four times as many foot problems as men. "The higher the heels, the more weight is thrown onto the balls of your feet and the harder your body has to work at keeping you upright," says Annette Bourdon, a chiropractor in Montreal. Squishing your tender tootsies into tight, narrow shoes can lead to some very unattractive foot problems, including corns and calluses, claw-like hammertoes and bony bunions. As if that's not painful enough, those strappy stilettos may also contribute to knee and back problems and tight calf muscles – ouch!

Still, many of us aren't ready to lose the leggy look of Louboutins altogether. Here's how to strut your stuff as painlessly as possible.

- Lowering your heel height by even an inch makes a big difference, says Bourdon. "Watch what they wear on the dance shows on television," she advises. "Footwear is no more than 2½ to 3 inches in height and offers good support at the ankle."
- Pack a pair of emergency flats to wear at your desk or anytime you can't bear to take another step in your heels.
- Most high heels are poorly cushioned, so consider adding ultraslim insoles designed to fit without crowding toes or making shoes feel tight.
- Avoid standing or walking in heels over two inches high for more than four hours straight. Slip heels off whenever you can, wiggle your toes and loosen those tensed-up foot muscles (see "Feel-Good Foot Stretches," this page).

GIVE YOUR PEDI A MAKEOVER

It takes more than a pretty polish to get feet summer-ready. Prepare those puppies at home with this quick and easy medi-pedi.

Soak: Treat feet to a warm 10-minute footbath. Add Epsom salts for added relaxation, or mix in a product such as Johnson's Foot Soap to soften corns and calluses or Pedifix Tea Tree Ultimates Soaking Crystals to fight fungus and bacteria.

Exfoliate: Slough off any thickened dead skin buildup (known as calluses) around heels, balls and sides of feet with a pumice stone or foot file. If you have badly cracked heels or pesky corns (those thick bumps of skin most often found on the toe), have a foot-care expert shave them down using a scalpel, advises Stern. Don't attempt to treat corns or calluses yourself by trimming, shaving or using over-the-counter medications.

Trim: Use a toenail clipper to trim nails straight across so they're about even with the tops of your toes. To prevent painful ingrown toenails, avoid rounding the edges.

Moisturize: Since feet have fewer oil glands than the rest of the body, they can end up parched and cracked. Lock in moisture with a urea-based foot cream. Wipe away any moisturizer between toes – a prime breeding ground for icky fungal infections.

Polish: For a perfect polish, use the three-stroke method, suggests Anh Nguyen, owner of Cranberry Flirt, an express nails and blow-dry bar in Toronto. Place the brush in the middle of your nail at the cuticle line and pull it upward toward the tip. Repeat on the sides. Regularly remove the polish to let nails breathe and prevent discoloration. »