

Chatting with the Good Dr. Laura L. Shook
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I grew up in the quaint seaside village of Carmel located on the northern coast of California. Known for its lovely views, fresh air and pricey housing Carmel has some unusual laws which forbid fast food, neon lights, stop lights, live music and the wearing of high heels without a permit (a permit to wear heels is available at city hall for \$1). I think the ban on live music was a desperate attempt to keep the hippies in Berkley (it didn't work). I never missed the neon, traffic lights or fast food, but why ban high heels? Perhaps it was to protect the city from law suits. I can still recall the image of fashionable lady tourists limping into my family's pharmacy after catching their fashionably smart heel and tumbling, none to gracefully, onto in the irregular pavement of our village streets. My pharmacist daddy would bandage their scrapes and recommend they switch to sneakers for the remainder of their holiday. I, a young and impressionable girl, saw first hand the importance wearing practical shoes.

Many years have passed since I last watched my father give first aid to a bruised and bleeding tourist. Since that time I've been to school where I learned a whole lot about human anatomy, physiology, pathology, bones, joints, muscles, tendons and nerves. I've practiced as a chiropractor for nearly 20 years and I've seen the damage that can be done to the body through neglect, abuse and injury. Trust me when I tell you that high heels, including heeled cowboy boots, are bad for you.

High heels force the body onto the toes; the ankles are unstable and prone to injury. In this tippy-toe stance the force of gravity shifts posture and tremendous stress is put upon the back, hips and knees straining cartilage and discs. The constant incline of the foot forces the calf muscles to thicken and muscle fibers to shorten. Some women loose the ability to walk flat footed. Bunions, hammer toes, Morton's neuroma these are but a few of the painful and disfiguring consequences from the long term wearing of high heels.

Some might say "but they are so pretty" Do not make me go into horrific detail about ancient China and the crippling of little girls so that their tiny bound mutilated feet could meet societies expectations of beauty and sexual appeal.

A wider lower heel will allow the ankle a little stability. A wider toe box also helps, a little, to reduce crushing damage to the toes and foot. Exercise and stretching will help. Massage, chiropractic care, visits to the podiatrist and orthopedist will also help but nothing is going to help as much as gradually reducing the height of the heel worn until, eventually, the foot is shorn in a well fitting, flat or nearly flat shoe with proper arch support and a comfortable toe box.

For more information of selecting shoes and quality of foot health ask your health care provider or look to the American Podiatric Medical Association at www.apma.org

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