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I'd like to Tell the World about Shoe Wear

As we age our feet get less tolerant of tight fitting shoes and high heels. Over a lifetime (particularly in the case of women) tight shoes result in deformity and compression of the nerves between our toes. As you read this, no matter what your age, start thinking about ways in which you can modify your shoe wear and start wearing more "healthy" alternatives. Just try to add an occasional wider shoe to your habit. Think about using arch supports in some of your shoes or getting a shoe with more support for your arches. You don't have to make a paradigm shift in your shoe wear, just a gradual move in the healthy direction. Give your feet a break.

High heels: Shoes with high heels force your feet down into the narrow toe space and jam your toes together. This also compresses the nerves between your toes and over the years will contribute to numbness in them. Try to avoid wearing high heels for long periods of time. Put on a comfortable shoe to walk to work or shop and use the heels for shorter periods of time. It will save your feet a lot of misery in the future.

Open backed shoes: These are also known as mules. My patients often tell me their mules are so comfortable. This is mainly because you can easily slip them off when you're not walking in them. Open backed shoes force you to use your toes to keep them on when you lift your foot, especially if they are loose-fitting. If they are tight enough to stay on your foot when you lift it, then they are squeezing your toes and forefoot too much. Open backed shoes include mules, flip-flops, slings, clogs and slippers. They're very cute, but think about replacing them with closed-back alternatives. Instead of flip flops, get a sporty sandal with a sling back. Instead of a backless clog, get the ones with a complete back or a partial lip. Exchange slip-on slippers for ones with a back. There are plenty of varieties which are easy to slip on, even with a back.

Pointed shoes: Historically speaking, I can assure you that a man invented pointed shoes. It's simple. Cobblers were men! Just put one of your pointed shoes on the floor and then stand on your foot next to it. In what world does your foot fit in that shoe the right way? Just imagine what it is doing to your toes the whole time it's on. Here is my advice to women, never wear these again once you have a husband. If you're not looking for a husband, then I see no reason to ever wear them. I have no advice on pointy shoes for men.

Strappy shoes: Straps can cause a lot of damage depending on where they tie down your foot. Keep in mind that a shoe with only a couple of straps places a lot of pressure on the area under that strap. There are little superficial nerves in your feet which can be damaged by a strap. If you take your strappy shoes off and there are deep, red indentations left by the strap, perhaps that is a sign to you to get rid of that shoe. Would you ever wear a shirt that left a deep, red indentation in your wrist? Then why would you do that to the two little structures that hold up the entire weight of your body. Sometimes straps come across bony prominences on your foot, like a bone spur on the top of your arch. Ditch them. Sometimes straps cause numbness. Ditch them. Permanent damage to these nerves can be the result of tight straps!

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Tight shoes: This is one of the most common abuses to feet I see and again, it's mostly in women. Guys don't tend to get stuck on their high school size and stay there. They are all about comfort and not about style or trying to make their feet look smaller. The urban legend of our feet getting larger as we age doesn't really refer to actual growth of our feet. It probably has more to do with the fact that we're just less tolerant of tight shoes as we age. That's a good thing. As many people age they begin to retain fluid in their legs and feet. This will result in a larger foot! Arthritis and bunions can also force one into wearing a larger shoe to accommodate the expanding width of the foot.

If the flesh of your foot is squeezing out the top of your shoe, you need a larger shoe. If you notice red lines around the edge of your shoe, you need a larger pair. If you take your shoes off and your toes are rectangular, looking like packaged wieners...if your feet are numb after wearing your shoes for an hour...if you get ingrown toenails from wearing certain shoes...are you getting the point?

Here's a tip for deciding on a healthy size for your foot. Put the shoe down beside your foot. Stand up and put full weight on your foot so it can spread out in a natural way. Look at the shoe. Does it look like your foot will sit comfortably in that shoe? Most of the time when I have my patients do this, it is obvious. That foot, like Cinderella's sisters' feet, has to be crammed into that shoe. Get a larger size.

Listen, I love a pointed, strappy, high heeled mule just like any girl. But those shoes sit in my closet...a lot. I reserve them for special occasions when I can justify the pain and the damage I know they are doing to my feet.



What kind of shoes should you wear?

- Shoes with a back
- Flat shoes
- Boots
- Running shoes with a good arch support
- Thick, woolly slippers with a back
- Clogs with a back
- Wider width shoes



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