

# High Heels Get a Bad Rap

By Dr. Michael Nirenberg

If you're a woman with foot problems—perhaps bent, crooked toes such as hammertoes or bunions, or corns and calluses—it's not due to wearing high heels.

Our doctors, mothers, and even pop magazine articles have sold us on the idea that foot problems among women often come from wearing high heels. However, after treating hundreds of women who had horrible feet and swore they rarely, if ever, wore high heels, I began to question if high heels were really the culprit. Could women's feet be genetically unique from men's? And could these differences make them more likely to develop foot problems? The answer was a resounding yes!

Like the female brain and most of her body, doctors and scientists are finally beginning to realize that the female foot is remarkably different from that of the male. A woman's feminine frame (generally, wider hips and proportionately shorter legs) and her precise chemical physiology (pregnancy, menopause, and menstrual cycle, or lack of a cycle) profoundly affect her feet, altering their function, shape, and at times, chance of injury.

Even the shape of a woman's foot is unique. Compared with males, women have a foot that is shorter and narrower, with an instep that isn't as long (the average American woman wears a shoe size of 8.5).

Taken together, all these factors create a “female foot” that is more prone to foot problems, such as hammertoes, bunions and pinched nerves—with or without high heels.

Does this mean I recommend you wear high heels? That would be like a nutritionist recommending Häagen-Dazs! High heels place your feet in a weakened position, causing foot problems that would develop anyway to worsen more quickly, and high heels worn excessively can cause their own unique foot problems, such as pinched nerves, bent toes, or a shortened, tight Achilles tendon.

Wearing high heels should be similar to a dieter having a hot fudge sundae occasionally: it's a decadent treat. The key word is “occasionally,” and you should add to that “briefly.”

Now that you know the truth about high heels, feel free to slip on a sexy, gorgeous pair and look stunning—briefly and occasionally—without guilt!

Dr. Michael Nirenberg is a foot specialist located in Crown Point who specializes in women's foot problems. To schedule an appointment call 219.663.2273 or visit [friendlyfootcare.com](http://friendlyfootcare.com).

