



Next Step

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Walk This Way

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The shoes you wear can make you feel slim, sexy, and stylish- or they can leave you wincing in pain. Ever wonder how much damage you are doing when you walk to work in sky-high heels or scuff through errands in flip-flops? We wanted to find out for sure, so we took three 40-something women to a high-tech motion-analysis laboratory to test out four different types of shoes: flip-flops, high heels, dress flats, and toning sneakers. (Results were compared with our gold standard of comfort- a simple pair of running shoes.) At the lab, the women were outfitted with sensors to measure muscle and joint activity so we could see precisely what types of stress their bodies were subjected to. Read on to learn the findings and (since we know shoe choice is not always based purely on practicalities) get expert advice on how to make even those stilettos as foot-healthy and pain free as possible.

Flipping Out

They may be your favorite things to slip on as soon as the weather gets warm, but flip-flops aren't as foot healthy as you might think. Here's why: **Scrunch time.** Only a thin strap and your bunched toes keep flip-flops from coming off. That constant grip makes it impossible for your arch to flex normally, which in turn compromises the way your forefoot pushes off when you step forward. Deprived of a powerful push-off, our testers compensated by using their hips, forcing their knees and hips to absorb more impact. In addition, your butt and the backs of your legs are less engaged in your stride, weakening those muscles over time, says Katy Bowman, a biomechanical scientist and the author of *Every Women's Guide to Foot Pain Relief*.

Short steppin'. Wearing flip-flops shortens your gait, so you can't expect to get very far very fast in them. Eventually, your shortened stride may lead to lower-body fatigue, which in turn may make you more inclined to hop in a cab or get in your car rather than hoof it, says Philip J. Vasyli, a podiatrist and founder of the orthotic company Vasyli International.

Flip-Flop Fixes

Stretch it out. To help your toes recover from the stress of being clenched, stretch the muscles along the top of the foot, says Bowman. Stand with your feet hip-width apart, then place one foot behind you, turning the tops of your toes to the floor. Try to keep both knees straight, stand tall, and don't let your ankle roll out to the side as you stretch. **(Cont. on Pg. 2)**

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Walk This Way, Cont.

Start by holding the stretch for a few seconds on each side (your foot might cramp initially because it's not used to stretching this way), and work up to 60 seconds on each side.

Shop Smarter

If you can't fathom going through a flip-flop-less summer, opt for a more structured pair. Look for a contoured arch that fits to the shape of your foot (brands to buy: Chaco, Reef, Orthoheel, and Dansko, all of which have the American Podiatric Medical Association's Seal of Acceptance) rather than the flimsy corner-drugstore ones that look like they're stamped out of a piece of rubber.

The Heel Deal

There's a reason most women willingly forgo comfort to squeeze their feet into stilettos: Adding inches makes you look slimmer, accentuates calf muscles, and even lifts your backside.

But you may be doing lasting damage if you live your life in heels. A 2011 Danish study found that walking in heels can increase the risk of osteoarthritis six-fold.

Here's what else we found in testing:

Tighter quads. Imagine standing on the edge of a ski slope with your toes pointing downhill. To compensate for this tipped-forward position, it's natural to bend your knees slightly and arch your back. As a result, your quads are forced to work overtime, which makes them tight and prone to injury. Walking with your knees slightly bent also puts 200% more stress on your kneecaps, which can wear away at the cartilage and increase your risk of developing arthritis, says Howard Dananberg, DPM, a podiatrist in Bedford, NH.

Screaming shins. The added height of heels puts extra strain on the shin muscles, which control the forefoot. This repetitive strain can eventually lead to painful shin splints.

Knotty calves. Heels put your calf muscles in a shortened position. Over time, this can become permanent: One study in the *Journal of Experimental Biology* found regular heel wearers had calf muscles that were an average of 13% shorter than those non heel wearers, making it uncomfortable for them to walk without heels because their natural stride was thrown off.

Heels Help

Stretch it out. Give your calves a good daily stretch like this one from Bowman: Stand with your feet hip-width apart and place a rolled-up towel under the ball of your right foot. Lower your right heel to the floor. Once you're comfortable here, take a small step forward with your left foot, keeping your hips square. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds and work up to 60 seconds.

Massage your shins. Relieve shin pain with a gentle self-rubdown, applying long vertical finger strokes down the front of your lower leg. Then focus on kneading the muscles horizontally, says Bowman.

Embrace the commuter shoe. Switch to low-heeled options for getting places, and save those skyscrapers for when you're mostly sitting pretty.



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March Shoe of the Month: Slingbacks

Dynamic and sexy, sling backs exude the confident energy of those who wear them. Find a sling back with a lower heel so they can be worn from day to night. Make sure straps aren't too tight, as that could lead to chafing on the back of the heel, and conversely, make sure they aren't too loose, so that straps are not constantly being pulled up. Pictured are Aerosoles Gintility.



Weight Loss Tech: By Brian Ayers

These days almost everyone has an iPod, smart phone, iPad, or is in front of a computer for a large part of their day. We are all plugged in and gadgeted up and while some view these items as a step away from a healthy active lifestyle, they can actually be great tools to improve your fitness and aid in weight loss. There *is* an app for that!

There are several ways you can use the abundance of technology around you to help you to your goals. One of the simplest ways is using scheduling programs and reminders. The most important part of any exercise or nutritional program is consistency. Unfortunately, that is one of the toughest hurdles for many people to overcome. The top reasons people cite for skipping meals or missing workouts is that they ran out of time or simply forgot. Time management can be challenging but just about every smart phone or computer comes with some type of calendar or day planner. Most people use them to schedule work related appointments, but I encourage my clients to also schedule their workout times as well. Instead of simply assuming that you will fit your workout in when you have time, you are making an appointment with yourself and further solidifying your commitment to your goals.

Scheduling applications can also be used to improve your nutrition. Most people are aware that eating small meals frequently throughout the day has been shown to improve your metabolism and aid in weight loss. However, remembering to have those meals during a busy day is a challenge all in itself. Set yourself daily reminders that will beep, buzz or pop up on your computer screen when it's time to eat your meal or snack. The key to successfully utilizing this strategy is to plan ahead and have those meals or snacks with you so that when you get your reminder, you don't have to interrupt what you are doing to go find food.

Far beyond simple scheduling benefits, the recent surge of handheld technology has brought with it a plethora of applications for managing all aspects of our lives including health and fitness. There are apps for nutritional logging as well as workout tips and tracking calorie expenditures. There are even virtual trainers that talk you through sets and reps through your iPod. (Although, they still haven't come up with an app that will ensure you are doing the exercises properly so we trainers can keep our jobs for a while longer.)

Whether you are using simple reminders or advanced weight management software programs, the bottom line is that any tool that increases your mindfulness regarding your personal wellness can be extremely beneficial. I recommend visiting the application website for whatever device you own and searching through their health and fitness category. Many apps are free or cost under \$10, which is not a lot to invest to aid in achieving your weight loss goals.

Brian Ayers is the owner of Rugged Fitness in Wethersfield. For more information about his gym, visit: www.areyourugged.com.

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In My Spare Time...

This past February, Dr. Craig Kaufman, DPM traveled to Park City, Utah for the “Cutting Edge Topics and Techniques in Foot and Ankle Surgery” conference to learn the latest in treating your foot and ankle problems. Workshops included Midfoot and Heel Procedures, Forefoot, Rearfoot, and Ankle Trauma.

Besides being a learning experience for Dr. Kaufman, it was an opportunity to participate in one of his favorite hobbies: skiing!

Park City has 9,326 acres of the Greatest Snow on earth, 426 runs, bowls and parks and 58 lifts. It is any skier’s dream location! Dr. Kaufman started skiing when he was about 12 years old. While he has no favorite place to go and ski, he loves going out West. He is currently teaching his 8 year old son how to ski.

At Connecticut Foot Care Centers, Dr. Kaufman’s special interest is in the area of sports medicine. From football to running to skiing, let Dr. Kaufman take care of your foot care needs.. Be sure to check out his new blog: Sports and Your Feet in CT, <http://www.sportsandyourfeetct.blogspot.com> and follow him on Google+ and Twitter: @CTSportsPod.

