

SHOES CAN BE A PAIN!

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By **Devika Pathak**

Cinderella may have been on to something. Experts tell you what footwear to pick and what to ditch.

It seems that there has never been a real consensus about what kinds of shoes cause the most or least damage. Of course, we know that sky high heels can be dangerous, especially on an uneven surface, but what about the other styles of shoes available out there? Dr Abhishek Kini, a foot and ankle surgeon associated with Sportsmed Mumbai, Hinduja Hospital and [Lilavati Hospital](#) explains what shoes work for you and what styles are best avoided.

High heels

As much as we love the way high heels make our legs and feet look, it's obvious that teetering on your toes atop a towering spike may not be the best for your foot health. Dr Kini highlights that these shoes do indeed come at a price.

“Wearing these can cause shoe bites at the very least. Long-term usage of high heels leads to bunions (the big toe turning inwards), ankle instability (rolling over) and postural issues like lower back ache.”

As the shape of the heel pushes the foot in to an unnatural position, wearing high heel shoes puts a lot of stress on the ball of the foot. This intense pressure can cause the bones around this area such as the long metatarsal bones, the sesamoid bones and the phalanges to become inflamed.

Flip-flops

One would imagine that a shoe as comfortable as the humble ‘chappal’ could never cause any damage to the foot. Wrong again! When walking for long distances in flip-flops (or even barefoot), you can aggravate the band of tissue that runs along the bottom of your foot (the plantar fasciitis). “The problem with the flip-flop is that there is virtually zero protection and support. The lack of the arch can lead to problems like plantar fasciitis and the open design makes one more susceptible to cuts, scrapes and injuries,” says Dr Kini. Wearing these for extended periods may lead your plantar fasciitis to tear or get inflamed. Think: agony!

Ballet pumps

As comfortable and functional as flats can be, we were surprised to hear that even these corporate staples can hurt the feet. “The lack of arch support in these shoes can result in knee, hip and back problems. The best way to combat this would be to insert orthotic insoles into the shoes to create an arch and reduce the pressure on your feet,” says Dr Kini. By adjusting for this simple issue, these shoes turn into the perfect footwear for daily use as they come in a variety of styles and designs and work with almost any outfit.

Wedges

Wedges may seem to be the answer to fashion woes as they offer the same advantages of stilettos in terms of style and look, and yet also seem to offer the support of a flat shoe. If only being fashionable was that easy! “The rigid foot-beds of wedges don’t lend the foot the support it needs, and they shape your sole into unnatural positions. There is also extra pressure put on the metatarsal bones on the ball of your feet, which can lead to pain and even inflammation,” says Dr Kini. “The benefit of these shoes is that one can balance better in them as opposed to stilettos, and this reduces the risk of falling down, but ankle sprains and tears can be just as common with wedges, especially if they are very high,” he adds.

Sneakers

Sneakers present a great mix of form and function. That they have been elevated from their status as gym shoes and are now being showcased on runways around the world is a true blessing for all.

“Sneakers allow your feet to breathe, relax and be properly supported for activities like walking and running. Another advantage of sneakers nowadays is that with the variety of brands and designs, you can find a pair that works for your particular foot shape. For example, this could mean a shoe with a higher arch or more padding,” says Dr Kini. When travelling to a place where you know you’ll be walking a lot, a sneaker is your best bet. The socks protect your feet from sweat and humidity while giving you a little extra support as well.