

The New Zealand Herald

Dangers don't dampen local love of high heels - expert

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High heels are more popular than ever in NZ. Photo / Thinkstock

Killer heels may cause crippling damage for some long-term wearers but that isn't deterring Kiwi women - and there may be an upside, says a foot expert.

An addiction to high heels not only causes pain for many wearers, but can also trigger permanent damage such as bunions, nerve damage, joint problems and stress fractures, say researchers.

However, the findings are doing little to deter Kiwi women according to retailers, who say the shoes are as popular as ever.

While the downsides of high heel wearing are well known, there was a lesser-known upside, said Auckland podiatrist Simon Speight.

"I often see people with arch pain, and the women wear a modest high heel shoe and it can actually resolve it [the pain] because they've been wearing really loose, floppy loafers or street fashion shoes and they put their feet into these and the pain abates," he said.

British researchers from the College of Podiatry surveyed 2000 British men and women and 60 podiatrists and chiropodists. The study found high heels forced women's feet into unnatural shapes which can cause intense pain and long-term, irreparable damage, the *Daily Mail* reported.

In the short-term women start to feel pain one hour six minutes and 48 seconds after putting on heels.

For 20 per cent of the women the pain started even earlier - after just 10 minutes.

Corns, ingrown toenails and bunions were common complaints from women who often wore high heels, but these effects "just becomes part of their lifestyle" for those who love wearing heels, said Mr Speight.

Other top foot problems reported by women in the study were blisters, verrucas, corns, and ingrown toenails, *The Daily Mail* reported.

Celebrity Sarah Jessica Parker has suffered skeletal damage from her love of high heels, and Victoria Beckham has got bunions because of it, the report said.

The younger the woman, the higher their heels.

About 20 per cent of those aged 18 to 24 own a pair of six-inch high heeled shoes, compared to 10 per cent of those 25 to 34 and three per cent of 35 to 44-year-olds.

In spite of the ill effects, women and men won't stop wearing high shoes, said Mr Speight.

"There's obviously a reason these are worn - to make the person look taller or the legs appear longer. Women are going to keep wearing them."

Saleswoman Georgia Andrewes (CRCT), from shoe designer Kathryn Wilson, said high heels were popular with customers.

"We have quite a few ladies who'll come in at the start of the season and buy as much as they can without their husband noticing the bill too much. The most I've had is seven pairs [at once]."

Younger customers tended to opt for the highest heels, while others preferred a mid-range heel or platforms.

However comfort was still important to many, she said.

Only 12 per cent of men admitted to putting up with fashionable but uncomfortable shoes.

Top 10 foot problems women suffer:

1. Blisters (55%)
2. Cracked heels (45%)
3. Verrucas (28%)
4. Corns (24%)

5. Ingrown toe nails (20%)
5. Athletes foot (20%)
6. Bunions (13%)
7. Joint problems (11%)
8. Excessive foot odour (9%)
9. Arthritis (9%)
10. Muscular problems (8%)

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