

High heels are leading cause of ingrown toenails

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High heels can cause a number of foot problems, yet most women aren't willing to give their shoes the boot, according to podiatrists at Loyola University Health System (LUHS). Ingrown toenails are among the most common problems that result from high heels. This condition, also known as onychocryptosis, occurs when the toes compress together making the big toenails grow into the skin.

High heels and tight-fitting or pointed-toe shoes are a leading cause of ingrown toenails. These shoes create chronic pressure on the big toenails and prevent them from growing properly. Additionally, shoe pressure can cause the nail to puncture the skin leading to infection. Other causes can include trauma to the nail or fungal infections.

"Ingrown toenails can be painful, but many women are willing to cope with the discomfort in order to continue wearing their [high heels](#)," said Rodney Stuck, DPM, professor of Podiatry Medicine, LUHS. "However, more serious complications can arise and cause permanent damage to the toenail, if they are left untreated."

Dr. Stuck encourages women who wear heels to take these steps to manage ingrown toenails and prevent infection:

-- Cut out a cardboard tracing of each foot and attempt to place it in the shoe when shopping for a new pair. If it does not fit, then the shoes are too narrow

- Refrain from wearing tight hosiery
- Limit the amount of time in heels
- Wear heels on days that require limited walking or standing
- Trim toenails straight across the top
- Short soak of feet in lukewarm, soapy water or Epsom salts
- Dry feet and toes thoroughly with a clean towel
- Use a mild antiseptic solution on the toes

If pain, swelling and discharge develop, the toe is likely infected. It will need to be treated by a podiatrist who may remove a portion of the affected nail to aid in treating the infection. If the condition recurs or persists, permanent removal of the nail can be accomplished with a minor, in-office surgical procedure.

Dr. Stuck warns that people with diabetes should be particularly careful of ingrown toenails. These individuals may have poor circulation, which makes healing difficult. They also may be more susceptible to nerve damage from their diabetes, which can prevent them from feeling pain in their feet.

“If diabetic women do not feel discomfort, they may neglect to treat the ingrown toenails until it is too late,” Dr. Stuck said. “If ignored, this condition, which is easily treatable, can lead to an amputation.”

In general, if you give your feet the attention they need, they will look and feel healthy. A bit of extra care will allow women who prefer fashionable high heels to continue to wear them.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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