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KILLER SHOES

That Won't Kill Your Feet

It was a sole-searching mission:
We called in 525 pairs of spring shoes—
from chic flats to knockout,
I-Am-Woman stilettos.
Then we asked top New York
podiatrist Jaleh Hoorfar to pick
out the ones that your feet
will thank you for. Who says
comfortable can't be cute?

PLUS:

Oprah's own personal
pain-o-meter.▶

Sky-high heels
make bones injury
prone: Because
the ball of the foot
bears the body's
entire weight, you're
inviting a fracture.



The Shoe Doctor Is In

Even the sanest women can be shoe crazy—noticeably greedy and disturbingly vain about what they put on their feet. Given a choice between limping along in something really cool or running around in hideous “comfort” models, many of us would stick with crippled-and-gorgeous. But there’s a third way: Jaleh Hoorfar, doctor of podiatric medicine, is enough like us to empathize—she loves high heels—yet she’s trained to identify precisely what makes a shoe (a good-looking shoe, mind you) safe and supportive. Here’s what she told us. (And if the pair you adore flunks a couple of her tests: Wear them, cherish them, just don’t plan a five-mile walk in them.)

Sizes aren’t standardized. An 8 from one designer may be a 7½ or 8½ from another (shoes made in Europe are usually narrower in front), so don’t fixate on a number; always try on a half-size larger or smaller as well. To avoid buying shoes that are too tight, shop later in the day, when a bit of swelling is normal. And get remeasured yearly: Feet flatten and widen with age, pregnancy, and weight gain (if you slim down, your feet do, too).

Heavy shoes are suspect. They’re just too much work to walk in: Your feet get tired and roll inward, leading to painful side effects.

Materials should be flexible. Patent leather is wildly popular this season, but tricky for shoes because it doesn’t stretch to accommodate the foot (ditto for both plastic and fabric). Soft, high-quality leather or suede is ideal. Watch out for topstitching, which can reduce leather’s elasticity.

Cushioning is key. Most feet are low in fat, so they need padding to be happy. Use thin gel inserts for greater comfort, particularly under the ball of the foot on high heels.

Mid-high heels make sense. Three inches is Hoorfar’s limit. Not surprisingly, chunkier models are less inclined to wobble than the spindly kind (terrible for ankles). And your weight is better distributed if the shoe heel is centered under your heel, not placed too far back.

...And so do substantial soles. Ultrathin bottoms are torture, the doctor says: “There’s nothing between your feet and the street.” Luckily, some of today’s hippest styles (wedges and platforms) have solid bottoms that act as shock absorbers. You can also ask your shoe repair guy to add rubber soles.

High-cut means lower risk. Shoes with sexy “toe cleavage” tend to rub against the foot at the widest point, where bunions form. A more covered toe casing is safer. Deep-dipping sides—or no sides—allow feet to slop over the edges instead of remaining properly aligned.

Adjustability is a plus. Look for laces, straps, or ties that can be loosened when the foot swells.

High Heels



BEST PERFORMANCE BY A HIGH HEEL

Black and white spectator has high, stabilizing sides at the middle and front of foot, where you need the support most. Kate Spade, \$275.



Dotty heel, smart design: This pair is sexily open on the outside, but high-cut on the inside to prevent feet from rolling in. Bruno Magli, \$340.



Although Hoorfar isn’t a fan of patent leather, the nice wide strap and chunky (red!) heel on these Mary Janes won her over. Giuseppe Zanotti Design, \$425.



A little bareness, a lot of sturdy heel: This slingback is the perfect crossover artist for the winter-spring transition. Bongo, \$50.



Delicate enough to be sleek but never flimsy, mauve pumps rock in mock python—the hot skin for spring. Dior by John Galliano, \$395.

Wedges



BEST PERFORMANCE BY A WEDGE

A lofty ribbon-and-suede wedge might seem extreme, but it’s reassuringly well anchored with multiple straps. Salvatore Ferragamo, \$360.



Sensible, spacious toe, steady-state heel—but baby blue pebbled leather makes this pump feel like total indulgence. Dolce & Gabbana, \$475.



Soft, top-quality leather and a not-too-scooped-out toe that “doesn’t impinge on the bunion area” get the doctor’s vote. Jimmy Choo, \$455.



It looks very day-at-the-races—but the mid-height heel makes this shoe surprisingly practical. Chanel, \$895.



Here’s an ultraflexible peep-toe with shirred side elastic in a pale, ballet-inspired neutral that makes feet look smaller. Capezio, \$75.



Hoorfar loves the way the broad, stretchy bands on this square-toed shoe hold the foot firmly yet comfortably. Donald J Pliner, \$225.



Not one but two braided-leather straps, at ankle and toe, make these navy and white heels well-balanced. Taryn Rose, \$475.



A strappy, pattern-happy cork-wrapped wedge is a subtle way to dabble in prints—here, a delicate floral in red and white. Claudia Ciuti, \$258.



Stacked heels are emphatically back, and they’re updated here in a breezy beige wedge with crisply topstitched bands. Naturalizer, \$69. ➤

“They’ll Stretch...” & Other Shoe Lies We Tell Ourselves

1 Flip-flops are so comfortable—they’re almost like going barefoot. When toes have to grip to keep the shoe on, it causes tiny tears in the ligaments of the arch (a.k.a. plantar fasciitis). Hoorfar blames trendy thongs for the many cases of arch pain that walked through her door last summer.

2 Long, pointy toes are bad for you. Since the points are purely decorative—your feet don’t reach that far into the shoe—they’re no worse than round toes. The spot to beware the big squeeze is right below the toes, where your foot is widest and bunions develop.

3 Flats are easy on your feet. Not if they have no lift at all. A half- or one-inch heel gives necessary support (especially for flat feet with a tendency to roll inward) and prevents calf muscles from becoming overstretched and weak.

4 Shoes always feel tight at first—they’ll stretch. Don’t buy shoes that hurt, period. Even a professional stretching probably won’t turn an uncomfortable pair into walking-on-air. (You can also try breaking in the shoes by wearing them around the house with thin socks for a few hours daily, but don’t get your hopes up.)

5 To save suitcase space, travel with only one pair. Never wear the same shoes two days in a row, much less for an entire trip: It puts repeated pressure on identical areas of the foot, causing irritation and letting misalignment problems get entrenched.

Wedges

(CONTINUED)



The pale rubber sole makes these shoes seem to float; a waxed-canvas wedge (how espadrille-esque!) keeps them grounded. Chanel, \$595.



The open toe and playful cutouts on this sandal give the foot some wiggle room. Just for fun: the inner light of a gold lining. Sam Edelman, \$99.



No heavy metal allowed: Although this gleaming little dreamboat looks pretty solid, it's foot-pleasingly lightweight. Kork-Ease, \$185.

Low Heels



The gathered front permits "give" and puts less pressure on toes, the doctor says. She likes the centrally located heel. Loeffler Randall, \$375.



Richly embellished leather-piped ballerina has a tiny heel (flat-out flats can be dangerous because they give zero arch support). Valentino, \$490.



A charming exterior—embroidered flowers on lush brownish burgundy suede—is backed up with great padding inside. Ecco, \$130.



A chic combo of stamped brown and blue leather from a designer (and ex-banker) known for her fun-loving office shoes. Terre Peck, \$320.



Peachy Italian-made peep-toe has a high vamp, low heel, and extra width—excellent for flat feet, says Hoorfar. Butter, \$198.



An affordable way to get in on the snake craze: a faux-python heel that gives just enough height. Strappy sides make it best for evenings. Talbots, \$110.

Platforms



Hoorfar is mad about this cabana-stripe peep-toe (so South of France). A cork heel makes it exceptionally light. KORS Michael Kors, \$195.



Call this a semi-lace-up—the satin bow gives a suede slingback extra flexibility at the toe, and, of course, it looks adorable. Jeanne Jarvaise, \$375.



Sky-high heels are actually quite tame, Hoorfar says, when you factor in the lift already achieved by the platform sole. Moschino, \$630.



Weightless cork is a good shock absorber—here, it supports a navy suede slingback (blue shoes are so cool this spring). Boden, \$124.



Good-as-gold peep-toe has a prudently low heel, so it can work all day, then go straight to a party in the evening. Apt 9, \$50.



Mary Janes in menswear plaid have a piquant girl-boy feeling, plus built-in comfort shoe technology to cushion and sustain the foot. Rockport, \$80.



"Nice and wide," says Hoorfar of this stacked heel (and flexible snakeskin can adapt to foot's ups and downs). Georgina Goodman for Ports 1961, \$460.

"PAIN IS A GOOD THING," says Jaleh Hoorfar, DPM. "It's an early-warning system that tells you something is wrong with your foot and forces you to address it."



Patent leather doesn't give much, but Hoorfar says this slick black crisscross pair looks wide enough to be comfy. Ann Taylor, \$128.



Like a suit with "dressmaker" details, this elegant silvery heel has two-way ruching on the squared-off peep-toe. Via Spiga, \$189. ➤

The Misfits: Shoe Crimes & Punishments



Prescription orthotics can make footgear more supportive.

The wrong shoes (too big, too small; too flimsy, stiff, or tall) are partly to blame for a host of foot problems. Switching to kinder, gentler styles is the first step toward relief. You can also ice, elevate, and take anti-inflammatories; in the

longer run, orthotics—customized insoles prescribed by a podiatrist that realign the foot—may also help.

What a heel. Chronic stiletto wearers, who give the tendon at the back of their heels no chance to relax, often develop an inflammation known as Achilles tendinitis: There's an ouch every time the foot hits the ground.

Hitting a nerve. Cramming feet into narrow shoes can lead to neuromas, benign growths of nerve tissue between the third and fourth toes. The symptoms may be tingling and numbness in the ball of the foot or a sharp shooting pain.

A bumpy ride. Bunions are enlarged, misaligned big-toe joints: The bone at the toe's base protrudes outward instead of joining the toe bones, or phalanges, in a straight line. There may be a genetic component, but tight shoes are also a factor.

The hard stuff. The body's way of protecting itself against friction (such as that caused by too-small or too-big shoes) is to thicken the skin into calluses (on soles) and corns (on toes). Hoorfar warns against over-the-counter, acid-containing corn removers, which can "eat" healthy tissue.

Platforms

(CONTINUED)



Shoes in your personal version of nude (here, a luscious beige) extend the leg line. A generous T-strap helps keep the foot steady. Calvin Klein, \$120.



A woven jute heel and platform (plus Nike Air padding technology) mean these well-grounded patent pumps won't hurt. Cole Haan, \$275.



You can't have too many straps, says the doctor, who took a shine to this chocolate patent leather platform with a hit of vanilla trim. Aerosoles, \$89.



Vitamin C for the feet: An orange peep-toe with texture—leather overlaid with mesh—has an appealing vintage feel. Shane & Shawn, \$140.



An inventive amalgam of tawny leather and subtle gold stitching breaks down the barrier between day and night. Bottega Veneta, \$960.



This sexy riff on Dorothy's ruby slippers has heels studded with red crystals. Gathered satin alongside the toe adds the greatest of ease. Prada, \$850.



Stacked heels have all the benchmarks of a gutsy, casual classic: wood platform, metal studs and rings, topstitched straps. Coach, \$258.

Flats

BEST
PERFORMANCE
BY A FLAT



Traditional driving shoe in up-to-date patent leather has preppy-meets-equestrian hardware. The rubber sole makes Hoorfar ecstatic. Cole Haan, \$245.



"Great sole," Hoorfar says of the driving-shoe-style bottom on these classic green suede loafers with white stitching. Lands' End, \$60.



Most ultraflexible foldups have little substance, the doctor says—but these flats have just enough of an inner lift to produce balance. Tod's, \$325.



Sunny print Italian-made slides look beachy and carefree; their hidden assets include a padded foot bed. J.Crew, \$88.



Give everyday footgear a shot of the exotic with hot-colored geometric-print flats. The inside story: plush cushioning. Oh...Deer!, \$75.



Energizing color, adjustable buckle, "breathable" rubber sole: Scarlet mocs let feet know the weekend has undeniably arrived. Geox, \$120.

The Best Brands for Finicky Feet

Narrow? Wide? Find a sole mate on oprah.com. O quizzed shoe retailers countrywide to come up with the preferred labels for your size and shape. Also online: More about orthotics (the podiatrist's secret weapon).

For details see Shop Guide.

Oprah's Personal Pain-O-Meter

Most of us organize our shoes according to style, color, or occasion (which pairs are for work, weekends, or big nights out). But Oprah also organizes hers by how long she can bear to keep them on her feet.



► **0 Minutes** "I love these shoes, but as cute as they are, after wearing them for an hour, my shins hurt so much that I had to go to the doctor!"



► **1 Minute** "Mariah Carey gave me these. They're great for making my legs look longer during a sit-down show, but that's it. I don't know how Mariah sings and dances in them!"



► **10 Minutes** "Another pretty pair that's strictly for TV—I take them off the minute the show is over."



► **1 Hour** "I can tolerate these Jimmy Choos for longer. I can even walk in them. The wider toe box gives me more wiggle room."



All Day (right) "This Manolo Blahnik slingback is the perfect heel. I can actually wear it out of the building, not just between the control room and stage."

Indefinitely (below left) "You know how you used to come home from school and change out of your good clothes? Well, these Prada flats are my after-school shoes—cute and comfortable."

"I've gone to parties wearing shoes that hurt so much, I wanted to COME HOME EARLY," says Oprah.
"What fun is that?"