

High Heels Don't Have To Hurt

Call them "high healers"—a new breed of doctors who won't make you trade in your stilettos for clunky old nurse shoes. Here, their to-dos on keeping feet pain-free.

It is possible to wear high heels without pain," promises Suzanne Levine, D.P.M., New York City podiatric surgeon and author of *Your Feet Don't Have to Hurt: A Woman's Guide to Lifelong Foot Care* (St. Martin's Press).

Here's all you need to know to defeat the four most common arch enemies.

Arch Enemy No. 1

ACHING ACHILLES Wearing strictly stilettos day after day can shorten your Achilles tendon, an extension of your lower-calf muscles that attaches to the heel bone and aids ankle mobility. "Heels shorten the muscles and tendons in your leg and heel," explains Dr. Levine. If you wear them every day, the muscles could become chronically shortened and restrict the flexibility of the ligaments on the bottom of your foot. This can sometimes result in sporadic shooting pain through your foot and ankle. For treatment of this or any other foot disorder, ask your personal doctor to recommend a podiatrist, a doctor whose work is devoted exclusively to the foot. Or find one by checking out the American Podiatric Medical Association's Web site at www.apma.org.

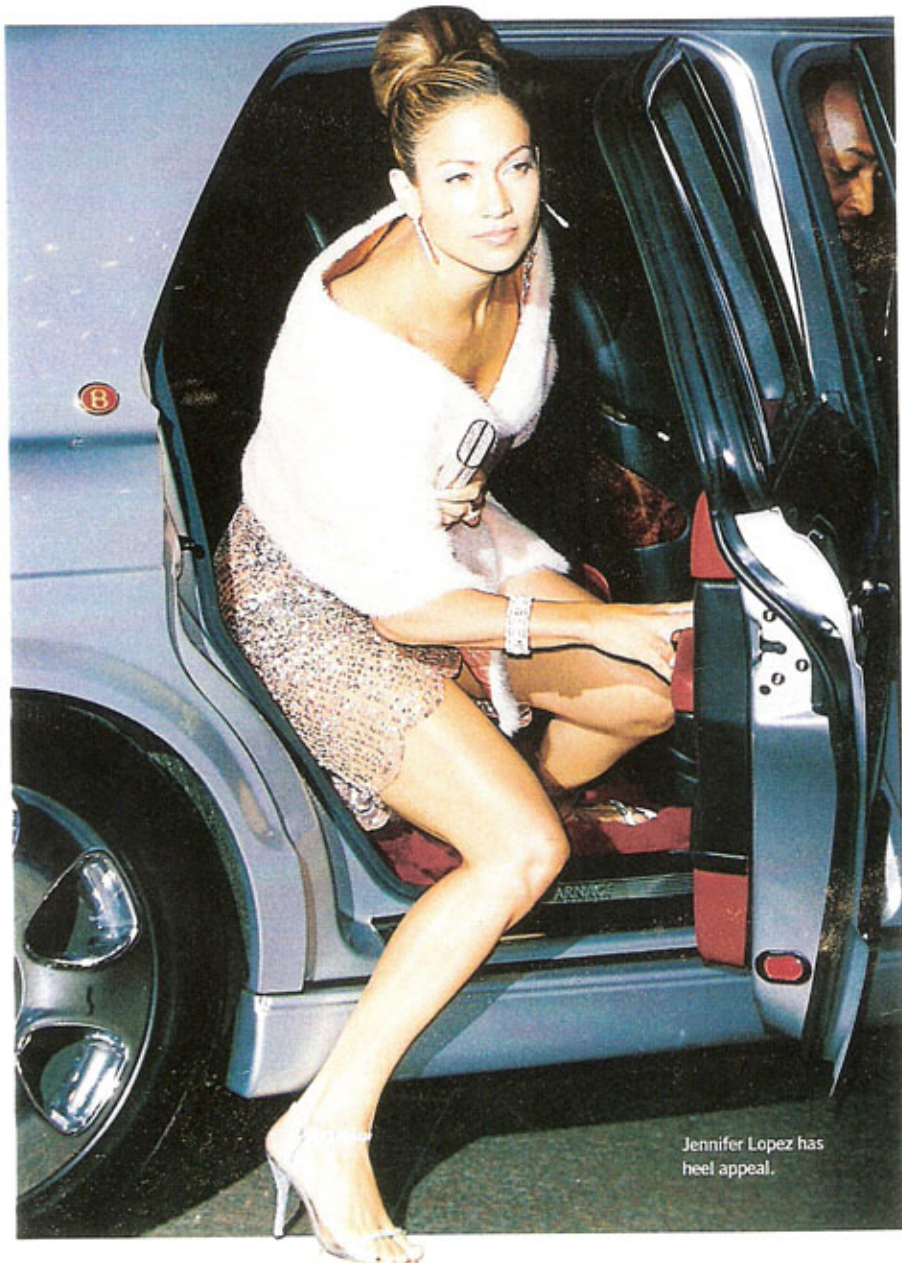
THE PEDI-CURE For mild heel pain, elevate your feet and ice the heel pad for 15 minutes to half an hour for three to five nights, and change to a one-inch heel for the time being, recommends foot specialist Rock Positano, D.P.M., codirector of the Foot Center at New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Cornell campus and author of *Disorders of the Heel, Rearfoot and Ankle* (Churchill Livingstone). If pain persists, ask your foot specialist about therapeutic ultrasound treatments, which shoot sound waves through the foot and ankle muscles, says Dr. Levine. The

waves are converted to heat, which increases circulation and acts as a muscle relaxer. Another treatment: electrical muscle stimulation, which sends painless currents through the foot and lower-leg muscles to decrease swelling and inflammation, according to Dr. Positano. The number of treatments varies, he says, but an acute case of Achilles pain would probably require twice-weekly visits for four to six weeks (about \$75 for a joint session of electrical stimulation and ultrasound).

PAIN PREVENTER "Don't exceed three hours at a time standing in heels," advises Dr. Positano. Stash comfortable shoes under your desk or in your car that you can switch off with your stilettos. But don't go too low. "Changing between high heels and flats can shock the Achilles tendon, causing more pain," he explains. Dr. Levine suggests stretching your calf and foot muscles daily. Write the letters of the alphabet in the air with your toes to loosen the ligaments under your arch. For calves, put one foot on the seat of a chair, and lean toward it until you feel a slight stretch. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat six times for each leg.

Arch Enemy No. 2

LOWER BACK PAIN "When you wear heels, the pelvis tilts forward," says Dr. Levine. "This puts added pressure on your lower-back muscles to



Jennifer Lopez has heel appeal.

help you stand upright, which causes strain and pain." Inadequate arch support is part of the problem—without a raised arch built into the shoe, your foot can wobble from side to side. "That throws the whole body out of alignment, leading to backaches," maintains David Klein, a New York City chiropractor and kinesiologist.

PEDI-CURE "The best thing to do is wear a good orthotic—an arch support custom-made by a podiatrist," asserts Howard D. Zaiff, D.P.M., a New York City podiatrist and diplomate for the American Board of Podiatric Surgery. Orthotics align your feet so that your weight is better-balanced, which in turn keeps your knees and back in line. New orthotics, called stylics, are now being made slimmer to fit even the narrowest of chic heels. **PAIN PREVENTER** To help alleviate the stress heels put on your lower back, Dr. Levine suggests you stretch it out by lying on the ground with the small of your back pressed into the floor, then bring your knees into your chest.

Arch Enemy No. 3

BURNING BALLS OF FEET A three-inch heel puts seven times as much pressure on the front of your foot as a one-inch heel, according to the American Orthopedic Foot and Ankle Society. There's an anterior fat pad under the foot protecting your bones, but as you get older the cushioning naturally deteriorates, leaving your foot exposed to the pain of pounding the pavement.

PEDI-CURE You can try over-the-counter foot pads to help cushion your soles, but if the pain does not subside, see a podiatrist. "The first line of defense is an orthotic that helps pad your sole, relieving pressure," says Dr. Zaiff. "Then I'd try anti-inflammatories, like Motrin, and physical therapy." Another (albeit expensive) option: a new laser treatment that Dr. Levine and her partner, Everett M. Lautin, M.D., claim creates more cushioning in the ball of the foot. After ultrasound, they prescribe the CoolTouch laser treatment, in which a laser is passed over the area, which they believe stimulates the body to create more collagen. Three to five sessions (at a cost of \$400 each) at two-week intervals are recommended, but results can last up to a year, according to Dr. Levine. Some doctors are skeptical, however, of this so-called quick fix. "There's no such thing as a miracle cure for a foot problem," argues Dr. Positano, who asserts that tried-and-tested techniques like orthotics, anti-inflammatories and physical therapy are the most effective and cost-effective route.

PAIN PREVENTER The key to putting out the fire in your feet is to start protecting them as much as possible from the average 10,000 to 15,000 strides you take a day. Place soft insoles or custom-made orthotics in your shoes, or have a shoemaker add a thin rubber sole.

Arch Enemy No. 4

NEUROMA The extra pressure that heels put on the balls of your feet can aggravate sensitive nerve endings between the toes. These inflamed nerves can then cause sharp pain between the second and third, or third and fourth, toes.

PEDI-CURE A podiatrist can inject a nerve-calming cocktail to cut down swelling and pain. These new ultrasound-guided injections allow doctors to find the precise location of the neuroma so they can inject the exact spot with a combination of a local anesthetic, vitamin B12 (known to maintain nerve tissue) and water-soluble steroids, which help shrink the inflammation, explains Dr. Positano. One to three injections (about \$50 each) should do the



Liz Hurley: heel lover

Treat Your Feet

Spoil your tortured soles with a super-luxe salon experience, or do it yourself at home.

REFLEXOLOGY

Spa splurge: Reflexology is based on the belief that the feet correspond to a map of the body. "Applying gentle pressure on reflex points can help the body heal," believes Barbara Morrison, co-owner of Angel Feet Reflexology in New York City, where a one-hour reflexology session costs about \$70. **At-home alternative:** Forget about learning the complex technique of reflexology and ask your man for an on-the-couch foot rub instead.

SALTING

Spa splurge: "Salting—an exfoliating rub using a special blend of salts—softens feet by sloughing off rough, dead skin," explains Suzanne Levine, D.P.M., a New York City podiatric surgeon who offers the 40-minute service (combined with reflexology) at her office for \$150. **At-home alternative:** Coat feet in a mixture of 1 cup kosher salt, 1 tablespoon baking soda, ½ cup Epsom salts and 8 tablespoons mineral oil. Cover in a plastic bag and wrap in a warm towel for 10 minutes. Unwrap, then gently rub feet with a pumice stone and rinse.

PEPPERMINT

Spa splurge: Craving a curiously strong spa experience? Pedicures that incorporate peppermint leave tired feet feeling cool and tingly, according to aestheticians at The Plaza Spa in New York City, where the Peppermint Foot Treat (which includes a foot wrap, scrub, rub and soak) costs about \$140. **At-home alternative:** Revive weary feet by rubbing on a peppermint-infused lotion. **Try** The Body Shop Peppermint Foot Lotion, \$11, 800-263-9746.

trick, but you'll probably need to repeat the series every 18 months. **PAIN PREVENTER** Keep nerves from getting squeezed in the first place by choosing shoes with wider toe boxes. "That's not to say you can't wear a pointy-toe shoe," points out Klein. Just look for ones that are wide enough through the balls of your feet. ©