Wearing stilettos for long periods can wreak havoc on your body

Don’t let heels be your Achilles’ heel

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The party season is almost synonymous with stilettos and the like.

But when even queen of glam Victoria Beckham has swapped her five-inch stilettos for trainers, you know it is time to reconsider.

Keeping your heels strapped for extended periods of time can wreak havoc on your body, from high forefoot pressure to Achilles pain, said Ms Cheryl Zhang from the NUH Rehabilitation Centre.

The senior podiatrist does not recommend anything with a heel pitch (the difference between the heel height and forefoot height) of more than 1cm.

The bigger the heel pitch, the more pressure is exerted on the ball of your foot.

The most common problem associated with prolonged heel wearing is forefoot pain due to high pressure in the ball of your foot.

COMPICATIONS

Skin complications such as calluses and corns can also develop due to high forefoot pressure.

The more serious problems include bruised or detached toenails from narrow or pointy shoes, short calf muscles and Achilles pain.

One of her more serious patients, Ms Zhang recalled, had severe bunion deformity and overlapping toes.

A bunion is a bony growth at the joint at the base of the big toe. It makes the toes turn at an angle, causing an unnatural pointing of the other toes and pain.

The patient also had short calf muscles and could not bear weight on the heel without any footwear.

While a short calf muscle does not pose problems when the heel is propped up, it can be uncomfortable when standing or walking around in flats as the muscle and tendon are stretched beyond their normal range of movement.

The hidden cost of adding that few extra inches to your body extends to the lower back.

Stilettos place your heels unnaturally above the toes and throw your posture out of alignment.

This decreases the stability of the wearer and places increased strain on the back as it tries to stabilise the wearer’s torso.

In the long run, this leads to lower back pain.

There is no magic number when it comes to the number of hours you can be on your stilettos before you start feeling the strain.

The pain factor hinges on factors like activity level, heel height and body weight, said Ms Zhang.

But if you cannot imagine stepping out of your high heels for something more comfortable, Ms Zhang recommends the following:

- Wear lower heels when a lot of walking is anticipated.
- Avoid pointed toe boxes and consider wider and round toe boxes.
- Opt for wedges instead of stilettos, or shoes with a forefoot platform to reduce heel pitch.
- Stretch your calves daily.

Kids’ characters to vanish from Dutch food packaging

Famous children’s characters such as Dora the Explorer may soon disappear from some commercial food packaging in the Netherlands to discourage unhealthy eating habits, said food industry representatives.

The decision was made after “public debates on the impact of advertising targeting children” as “obesity is a problem over which the food industry is greatly concerned”, the umbrella Dutch Food Industry Federation (FNLI) said.

The move, which will be a first in Europe, will see popular cartoon characters, also including Miffy the bunny, disappear from generic products perceived as unhealthy but which target children with packaging.

The new measure aims to curb packaging with “licensed media characters” aimed at children up to 13 years old, the FNLI, which represents 450 food industry businesses and 19 organisations, said.

“These products are placed on shelves at children’s eye level and are often unhealthy, containing too much salt, sugar or fats,” added popular tabloid De Telegraaf.

Dutch Health Ministry spokesman Leonne Gartz told AFP this will include removing characters, such as Dora the Explorer, from the packaging.

“It does not affect characters specific to products,” she added, citing the example of a tiger on a brand of cereals.

The FNLI hoped that the phasing-out would be implemented over the next year, following tests to ensure that the plan doesn’t lead to unfair competition in the market.

Dutch Deputy Health Minister Martin van Rijn praised the food industry’s initiative.

“It’s important to me that children and their parents are spared from the constant bombardment of seductive advertising on unhealthy foods,” he told De Telegraaf.

— AFP