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*"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"*

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## The Downside of the High Heels

As you may already know, firsthand or not, pain in the lower back, upper back, and neck are very common. There are many different reasons for these symptoms to arise, but there is one that I will discuss today that is not usually considered.



If you have ever worn a pair of high heel shoes and danced the night away, you will likely recall how your feet and back can ache afterward. New research from the University of Hong Kong demonstrates that the negative effects of high heel shoes may be more than just a little stiffness during and immediately after wearing them. The researchers used special radiographic procedures on the hip bones of women before and two weeks after wearing high heels. They found that the pattern of the “trabeculae” in the hip bones changed significantly. This “trabeculae” is the inner mesh of normal bone that provides their core strength. It is the density of this “trabeculae” that is lost when someone has osteoporosis, making the bones more prone to fractures. To offer the greatest strength, your body maintains or positions these trabeculae in specific patterns in

order to counteract the normal forces put through bone as you walk, jump, or run. Whenever you wear high heels, the direction of these normal forces is changed. If you continue to wear the shoes for two or more weeks, your body will respond by changing the pattern of the trabeculae to match the new forces the bone undergoes when you wear the heels. Sounds simple right? But, what happens when you take the high heels off and resume your walking or running? Now the trabeculae are in an altered pattern and your hip is not designed to handle as much stress as it should be able to. The researchers are now trying to see if this may contribute to someone experiencing a hip fracture.

Another better-known effect of long-term wearing of high heels is shortened muscles at the back of your lower leg. This makes them stiff and tight and much more prone to injury since they do not have their normal flexibility. Tightened calf muscles are also one of the major causes of painful muscle cramps at night. If you wear high heels or just have tight calf muscles, there are simple stretches I can show you to address this.

A third effect that high heels can have is to increase incidence of low back pain. Whenever you wear high heels, your pelvis automatically tips forward. This will increase the concave or “dish-shaped” curve in your low back. The result is that the joints of the low back are “jammed” together and the muscles have to work much harder to maintain your posture. This decreases the mobility of the joints and causes muscle tension, making the area more prone to injury. Just when you thought that was all, there are more negative effects further up the spine. If you increase the curve in the low back, your body will automatically increase the convex or “hump-shaped” curve in your upper back. The same effect of “jammed” joints and tight muscles will occur in the upper back as well. When the convex curve in your upper back is increased, your body will then increase the concave or “dish-shaped” curve in your neck. The same jamming effect on the joints and muscle tension will also occur in this region. Overall, consistent wearing of high heels can be the underlying cause of low back pain, sciatica, upper back pain, neck pain, and even headaches.

Obviously, the first thing you have to do is stop wearing high heel shoes! Then, see your chiropractor to learn how to stretch the tightened muscles. The chiropractor is also specifically trained to do gentle “adjustments” or “manipulation” to restore the proper mobility to the joints of your spine. Simply taking pain or anti-inflammatory medications for a problem that will just return as long as you wear those heels is not the long-term answer. Remember; treat the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms.