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

High Fashion Can Equal Big Problems

The look of the season shows runway models in high platform heels and oversized handbags. However, these popular looks and accessories are frequently impractical and can create leg, back, and neck problems.

For example, women generally wear high heels to complement an outfit and not for comfort. However, some might not realize that these shoes can cause serious discomfort in the feet and can also exacerbate back pain. High heels alter the balanced position of a person's body. When a woman wears high heels, a new dynamic equilibrium occurs. One can compare the musculoskeletal system to a mobile, hanging in dynamic equilibrium, each part balancing the other. If one part becomes 'altered,' the whole system will compensate with a movement or restriction. Essentially, wearing high heels for any length of time increases the normal forward curve of the back and causes the pelvis to tip forward. This alters the normal configuration of the pelvis and spine necessary for the body to maintain a center of gravity. Furthermore, the legs are the foundation of the musculoskeletal system, and a person standing flat-footed or bare-footed would be completely balanced. While standing, the hamstrings are taut and both parts of the pelvis are stabilized so that the support is normal. By bringing the heel up, you encourage the shortness of the hamstring muscles.

Another unhealthy fashion statement is the use of heavy purses and handbags. When I see people walking down the street with a two-ton bag, I want to stop them and make them aware of what it is doing to their bodies. However, out of fear of being hit with it I typically say nothing. Women and men tend to carry too many items in one bag, or briefcase, and are often not aware of the potential health risks associated with toting an excessive amount of "stuff." Carrying a bag with detectable weight-more than 10 percent of your body weight-can cause improper balance. When hiked over one shoulder, it interferes with the natural movement of the upper and lower body. The person carrying the bag will hike one shoulder to subconsciously guard against the weight, holding the other shoulder immobile. This results in the unnatural counterbalance movement of one shoulder and little control over the movements of the arms and legs. Even worse, the spine curves toward the shoulder.

In today's society, it might be important to you to look fashionable, but it is more important to

choose shoes and bags that are comfortable *and* that suit your style. By following and remembering these simple steps, it is possible to look and feel your best.

- Choose comfortable shoes. If you must wear high heels, bring a pair of flat shoes along with you to change into should you become uncomfortable. If you walk to work, wear flat shoes and change into your more fashionable shoes when you arrive to alleviate any pain or discomfort.
- If the shoe is uncomfortable while standing, chances are it will not be any more comfortable while walking. The wrong shoe can affect the body's center of gravity.
- Choose supportive shoes. Designer high heels or non-supportive loafers may look nice but do not allow for easy, symmetrical walking.
- Select a briefcase or purse with a wide adjustable strap. Ideally, the strap should be long enough to place over the head. This evenly distributes the bulk of the weight across the body.
- When carrying a bag, or briefcase, switch sides frequently to avoid placing the burden of the weight on one side of your body.
- Take the time to empty unnecessary items from your bag.

Designers and stylists tend to be more concerned about the way something looks rather than the way it feels. Listen to your body. One of the most important aspects of being in style and looking your best is to maintain healthy judgement. By following simple suggestions, being fashionable can be comfortable.