

We've all done it – seen shoes in a sale that don't fit and bought them anyway. In fact, according to the Society of Chiropractors and Podiatrists, 37% of us suffer in fashionable shoes. 'If they're too high, too flat or rub, shoes alter the way you walk,' says Sarah Robson, a Bupa physiotherapist. 'This affects your ankles, knees, hips and back.' A life of sensible shoes, then? 'Heels are fine now and then, just vary the type of shoes you wear,' says Sarah. With a few clever swaps, you can banish pain *and* tone up. What a great excuse for a shopping spree...

SWAP BALLET PUMPS FOR KITTEN HEELS

Your 'flats' are your sensible option for marching to work in, but ballet pumps are not as good for you as you might think. 'Completely flat shoes have such a thin sole that there's no shock absorption, so your joints take the pressure,' says Sarah Robson. 'They also have little arch support, which can lead to painful shin splints.'

Wearing a small heel, such as a kitten heel or mini-stiletto, is actually better for you. 'Most of us are used to wearing a bit of a heel, so flat shoes make calves feel stretched and can mean your heels strike the ground harder, which causes pain in the muscles around that area,' says Sarah. 'A heel of around an inch will take pressure off calves, and if you opt for a rubber-based heel, it will act as a shock absorber, too.'

SWAP UGG-STYLE BOOTS FOR BOTTOM-TONERS

They keep toes toasty, but flat sheepskin boots aren't doing your joints any favours. 'Ugg-style boots, especially cheap imitations, provide no support. Feet spread out in them and arches fall in,' says registered osteopath Gavin Burt, clinic director of Backs & Beyond (backsandbeyond.co.uk). 'They're bad for ankles as feet don't really move inside the boots and the flat sole can cause heel pain.'

Try the latest boots from FitFlop instead. 'These have a moulded sole and good arch support, so feet move in a much more natural way,' says Gavin. 'They also have more cushioning, so you're less likely to get heel pain.' Best of all, they also tone your bottom and thighs as you walk – what's not to love?

Happy feet

Sooner call your osteopath than ditch your designer heels? Try *Kate Langrish's* stylish shoe swaps for walkable good looks

SWAP HIGH HEELS FOR WEDGES

The *Sex and the City* girls have a lot to answer for. Experts say a whole generation of women is suffering from knee and back problems caused by wearing skyscraper heels for too long. 'High heels make you lose your centre of balance. They push you forward, which you correct by sticking out your bottom and arching your back,' explains Gavin Burt. 'This gives you a nice silhouette, but puts huge pressure on your knees and also makes muscles in the back tighten, which can pinch nerves in the neck and cause tension headaches.'

If you want the look of high heels without the risk, try platform wedges. 'Wobbling on a stiletto puts more pressure on your ankles, knees and hips – a wedge heel is more stable,' says Gavin. 'A platform wedge is even better because you get height without your foot being forced into the shoe at such a high angle.'

SWAP MULES FOR PEEP-TOES

Slip-on shoes may look dainty and elegant, but they can lead to problems with the tendons in your feet. 'Because they slip on and off so easily, you grip them by scrunching up your toes to keep them on,' explains Sarah Robson. 'This constant repetitive movement overworks the muscles and tendons, so you'll feel pain around the toes and over the tops of your feet.'

A strap around the back of the heel keeps shoes on without any need for toe-scrunching. 'Better still, peep-toes mean people can still see your lovely nail varnish, but they stay put and provide better arch support, too.'

SWAP OLD TRAINERS FOR BAREFOOT TRAINERS

Time to ditch those old worn-out trainers you've long since relegated to popping-to-the-shops status. They won't do you any harm – but the most up-to-date versions could improve your posture and refresh tired legs while you walk.

'Barefoot technology is the latest thing,' says Gavin Burt. 'It gives you the benefit of walking in bare feet – which works all the little muscles under the arches of your feet, toes and heels – without the risk of stepping in something!'

'Barefoot trainers work the leg muscles as if you're walking on grass, which helps to get blood to the calves and glutes and flushes out lactic acid – so they make your legs feel less tired. Trainers such as Nike Free Run have cushioning on the heel, so they're comfortable even on hard surfaces such as pavements.'

Posture perfect

Here's how to stop your high-heel hangover for good

Boost your core

Strengthening your core muscles – the ones that wrap around your waist and back like a corset – will help to improve your posture and take the strain off your back when wearing heels. 'Pilates is a great way to boost core strength,' says Sarah Robson. 'Or try shoes such as MBTs and

FitFlops. These have an uneven sole and the instability makes you use your core muscles more. Strengthening these reduces the likelihood of injuries in the future.'

See an expert

If you suffer pain in your knees, hips or back for longer than a day or two,

it's time to get expert help. Bupa's Apos Treatment analyses the way you walk, then designs shoe soles to help to realign your body. 'They gradually build and strengthen your muscles so, in time, you'll improve your posture whatever shoes you're wearing,' says Sarah. For details, visit apostherapy.co.uk. ♦

