

JOHNS HOPKINS *Women's* HEALTH

For The Health-Conscious Woman

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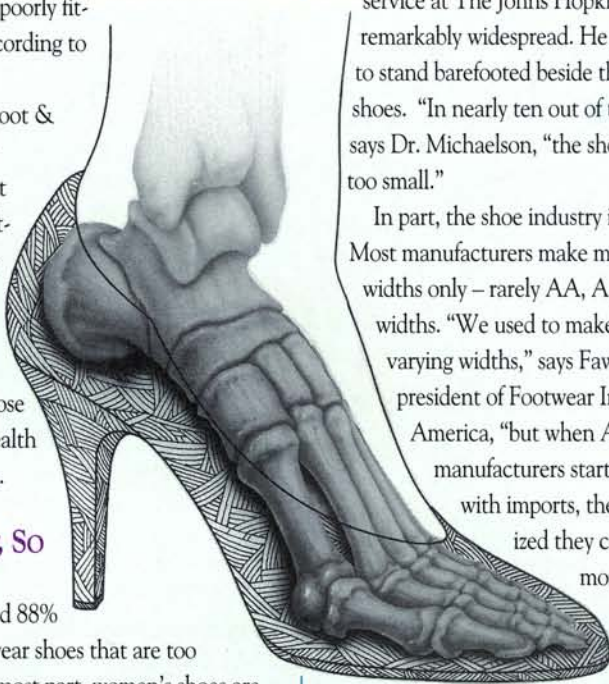
OUR ACHING FEET

Behold the foot – an architectural masterpiece consisting of 26 bones, more than 30 joints, and an intricately ordered maze of tendons, muscles, ligaments, nerves, and blood vessels. In a lifetime, this complex appendage traverses some 115,000 miles. That's more than four times around the world!

Small wonder, then, that approximately 75% of Americans experience foot problems at some time during their lives. These problems, say experts, are far more common in women than men. They stem mostly from a single cause – poorly fitting shoes. According to the American Orthopaedic Foot & Ankle Society (AOFAS), foot problems resulting from shoes that don't fit have reached epidemic proportions and pose a significant health risk for women.

TOO TIGHT, SO SMALL...

An estimated 88% of all women wear shoes that are too small. For the most part, women's shoes are too narrow for their feet. A 1993 study of 350 women by Carol Frey, M.D., professor of



If The Shoe Fits ...Only Then Wear It

orthopaedic surgery at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, showed that on average, women's shoes are one-half inch narrower than the width of their feet.

The small shoe problem, says James Michelson, M.D., chief of the foot and ankle service at The Johns Hopkins Hospital, is remarkably widespread. He asks patients to stand barefooted beside their empty shoes. "In nearly ten out of ten cases," says Dr. Michaelson, "the shoe is clearly too small."

In part, the shoe industry is to blame. Most manufacturers make medium (B) widths only – rarely AA, A, C or D widths. "We used to make shoes in varying widths," says Fawn Evenson, president of Footwear Industries of America, "but when American manufacturers started competing with imports, they soon realized they could save money by selling mainly B width shoes to women."

It all adds up to a problem of simple arithmetic. The average woman's shoe measures

three inches across at its widest point. The average width of a woman's foot, on the other hand, is slightly more than three and one-half inches. The narrower shoe is meant to give a thinner and more elegant look to the foot.

Moreover, women's feet generally become wider – sometimes as much as two sizes in width – with age. It's commonly believed that a woman's foot enlarges with pregnancy. That hypothesis – or "old wives' tale" – was recently tested by Saul Trevino, M.D., an orthopaedic surgeon specializing in the foot and ankle at the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

Women's feet were measured before, during, and after their first pregnancy. Foot size did *not*, however, enlarge permanently. "We expected to see a change," says Dr. Trevino. He now plans to test the theory that foot size enlarges after a *second* pregnancy.

HIGH-HEELS, LOW COMFORT....

For centuries, women have put foot fashion before comfort. In 15th century Venice,

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