

A film by Launette Rieb, MD and Peg Campbell

Captured: From Footbinding to Stilettos

STUDY GUIDE by Launette Rieb, MD

The “Footwear Tips” and “Try This” sections below are of practical value and suitable for everyone. The questions contained in the “Discussion Topics” section are meant to stimulate self-reflection and further study. The “Additional Questions” are intended for more in-depth exploration by senior high school, college and university students. A special set of questions is included for those studying to be health care professionals or those who are clinicians already in practice. A glossary of medical terms is listed. Some of the references and resources used to make the documentary and study guide are provided at the end and may be of assistance.

FOOTWEAR TIPS

Tips mentioned in the DVD – for adults 18 and over:

1. Women who wear shoes the same width as their feet (or up to just $\frac{1}{4}$ ” narrower) have the least foot pain and deformity.
2. At the narrowest a rare dress up shoe can be 0.6 – 1.2 cm ($\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ ”) smaller than the width of your foot measured across the ball (widest part).
3. Dress-up heel heights should be no higher than 5.7 cm ($2\frac{1}{4}$ ”).
4. Heel heights for daily footwear should not be higher than 2 cm (in the film I mention under 1” for ease of remembering, but truly it is closer to $\frac{3}{4}$ ”).
5. Choose shoes that conform to the natural shape of your feet and toes – with a deep and rounded toe box, and a well-fitting heel cup.
6. Padding down the whole of the inside of the shoe and especially under the ball of the foot (the metatarsal heads) can increase comfort and reduce pain.
7. Mark a card with your foot width and recommended heel heights to take shopping (see “Try This”).

Other tips:

- A. If you have osteoarthritis of the knee the dress heel height should be under 3.8 cm (1 ½”).
- B. A wide heel (or one that flares at the base) can provide more stability.
- C. Feet (especially women’s feet) can vary in length and width over a lifetime. Changes in weight, pregnancy, injuries, arthritis and aging can all affect the length and width of your feet. So measure them properly when you shop for shoes using the devices provided. Remember to measure your feet when standing.
- D. Since each shoe manufacturer uses a different “last” (the mold around which the shoe is formed), the sizing - especially for width - can vary a lot between brands. So it is best to make out your own card with your measurements to carry when you go shopping (see “Try This”). It is best to shop late in the day since some feet swell slightly by days end.
- E. There is some debate about how low to go with a heel for daily wear, and a slight cushioned heel just 1 to 2 cm is usually recommended, especially for sport. Yet there are people who prefer no heel and some who go barefoot even when running marathons!
- F. Unlike younger people, older adults tend to choose shoes that are too wide for their feet.
- G. High heels should be used just for rare dress up events – hopefully 3 hours or less at a time, and not for events with prolonged standing or walking.
- H. When wearing high heels, kick them off when you can and wiggle your toes.
- I. Choose materials around the forefoot and toes that have some give to them.
- J. When wearing high heels and ascending stairs make sure the forefoot and heel of the shoe both contact the stair. That way your thigh muscles will activate better to push you up.
- K. Give your feet time to relax and recover between times of high heeled shoe wearing.
- L. There are a number of manufacturers who make flat foldable shoes to slip into a purse when going out in high heels. This allows a ready change when the evening is over or if your feet start to hurt. Also there are shoes that have adjustable heels that convert between high and low (see reference section on high heels for one example).
- M. See number 8 below in “Try This” for how to use your hand as ruler the for the shoe height and width suggestions presented.

TRY THIS

1. Take off your right shoe and stand beside it.
 - How does the natural shape of your foot compare to the shape of the shoe?
2. Trace your foot on a piece of paper.
3. Measure the length.
 - How much longer is it than a 3" Golden Lotus?
 - This is the amount your foot would have had to be deformed to fit into a lotus shoe.
4. Measure straight across the widest part of the drawing of your foot (across the ball = metatarsal heads), and mark it down.
5. Measure the widest part of the sole of your shoe.
 - What is your foot-shoe width difference?
 - Does it fit the recommendations for those 18 years and older?
 - Daily footwear = 0 to 0.6 cm (1/4"), and sport shoes = 0 (the same width).
 - Dress shoe up to 0.6 – 1.2 cm (1/4- 1/2") narrower than your foot.
6. Measure the heel height of your shoe (N.B. you may need to subtract the thickness of the sole of the shoe – under the forefoot – if the shoes are thick soled all around).
 - Is it 2 cm (3/4") or less for a casual shoe (daily footwear)?
 - Is it under 5.7 cm (2 1/4") for a rare dress up shoe?
7. N.B. If you have osteoarthritis of the knee then dress shoe heel height should be under (1 1/2").
8. For adults 18 years and over, mark the edge of the paper used for your foot drawing with your ideal shoe widths and heel heights. Or you can fill out the information on a 3" x 5" index card like in the example given below. Fill in the blanks with numbers for your particular feet, and mark lines with the corresponding measurements along the bottom edge of the card. Take it with you shopping. You can then hold it up to the sole and heel of any shoe and see if it is the right width and height for you!

Try This - Examples

The adult recommendations on the card are modified from the ones developed by Dr. Francesca Thompson (see reference section for Corrigan J, Thompson FM. Instr Course Lect. 1995;44:371-7).

My FOOT WIDTH is _____. This is the ideal shoe width for a casual or sport shoe, with a heel height 2 cm (about 3/4") or less.

My NARROWEST DRESS SHOE WIDTH should be _____, that is 0.6 – 1.2 cm (1/4-1/2") narrower than my foot, with a heel height under 5.7 cm (2 1/4").

Dr. Rieb did an informal survey of the hands and feet of about 30 people both females and males ages 7 to 80. She found that in most adult cases the person's own hand may be used as a ruler to approximate the shoe recommendations, unless there is a foot deformity, like a bunion. On your pointer (index) finger the distance between your knuckle joint (MCP joint) and the next joint on your finger (PIP joint) is an approximation for your maximum dress up shoe heel height. The distance between the last joint (DIP joint) and the fingertip is a reasonable measurement for your maximum daily shoe heel height. Your palm width across the joints at the base of your fingers (MCPs) is about the narrowest dress up shoe you should wear. Hold up the sole of a shoe against the sole of your foot for daily/athletic shoe width. No clear recommendations exist for those under 18 who likely should wear shoes the same width as their feet and keep to heels under 2cm whenever possible.



Maximum dress up heel height

Max heel for daily footwear

Narrowest dress shoe width



DISCUSSION TOPICS

A. Ideals of Beauty

1. What beauty practices exist around you?
2. How are you affected by these practices?
3. What are the physical and/or emotional health risks of these practices?
4. What do people (both men and women) get out of these practices?
5. What are the historic origins of these practices?
6. What beauty practices do you participate in? Why? What do you gain? What might you be giving up?
7. If these behaviors have potential health risks what steps can be taken to lower the risks?

Additional questions:

8. How does an ideal of beauty arise?
9. What are the myths, power dynamics, and gender politics that produce and perpetuate these ideals?
10. Explore the concept of “beauty by impairment”.
11. Where are the boundaries between self-mutilation, body modification, and body art?
12. How do you see what is conformity, self-expression and personal choice when it comes to clothing and body modification? Speculate on how these practices will be viewed in 200 years?
13. How can unhealthy beauty practices get overturned and new cultural norms come to exist? Research an example.

B. Footbinding

1. Investigate other theories about the origins of footbinding. Could a clubbed footed empress have played a role? What about silk stockings on a dancing courtesan?
2. What was seen to be alluring about a foot that had been bound? What about the gait it produced?
3. What roles did men and women play in perpetuating the practice of footbinding? How and why did they do this?
4. What impact did having bound feet have on women’s health, safety, autonomy, and capacity for physical labor? What about status and ability to marry or attract a wealthy patron?

Additional questions:

5. How did the 1000 year old practice of footbinding get eradicated in China?
6. What role did exposure to other views play (for example, those of missionaries and western dignitaries) in the downfall of the practice?
7. What legal changes were put in place to halt the binding of girls' feet? Where these necessary? If so why?
8. What were the features of the government sponsored public re-education campaign to eliminate footbinding in Maoist China?

C. Stilettos and Other High Heeled Shoes

1. Do you wear high heels or pointed shoes?
2. If not, why? If yes, why? What do you like or dislike about stilettos? Where do you think these ideas come from?
3. Do you know anyone who has been harmed by wearing stilettos or other high heeled shoes or boots?
4. Research other theories about the emergence of the stiletto. Could the steel industry have played a role?
5. Explain the medical terms mentioned in the film (hallux valgus, bunions, hammer toes, Morton's neuroma, etc.). Can you find out what the impacts are of these changes on a person's function? For example, what is the problem with a shortened Achilles' tendon?
6. Can cowboy boots and other heeled and/or pointed footwear affect men's feet?
7. How do your shoe choices measure up to your feet and the recommendations made on the DVD? See "Try This" which is an important exercise for all students of every level.
8. What can you do to increase awareness among your peers of the hazards of high heeled shoe wearing?

Additional questions:

9. Research the different rates of foot pain and deformity between women and men. How much of the difference is attributable to footwear choices? Why is there a gender bias in footwear comfort?
10. What influences are needed to change the production, marketing, purchasing and valuing of stilettos and other potentially damaging shoes? Should it change? What role can you play?
11. Research shoes from different cultures and different points in history (see Bata Shoe Museum online) – and see if the footwear reflects that culture's behavioral prescription for the person.

D. Topics for Health Care Professionals

1. Do you take notice of the shoes your patients are wearing and take the time to ask about foot pain?
2. Review and expand on your knowledge of the physical health effects of wearing high heels. See “References and Resources”.
3. What do these health effects mean for the patient’s quality of life?
4. How can you assess your patients’ feet and choice of footwear? – see “Try This”.
5. How can you counsel your patients on the hazards of high heeled shoe wearing while acknowledging their personal choice? See the “Footwear Tips – expanded”.
6. What is the national estimated direct cost of foot surgery and in-hospital care that results from wearing high heeled shoes? What is the estimated overall indirect cost including lost work?
7. What roles are the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons and the American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society playing in educating the public about the hazards of high heeled shoe wearing? Visit their website and/or order their literature for discussion.
8. How can you use footwear as an entry point for the discussion of other beauty practices and their health effects?
9. What other beauty practices do you see in your patients?
10. Are there ways to reduce any harm associated with these practices?
11. Are you a positive role model for your patients regarding healthy pain free footwear choices? And what about other beauty practices?
12. How does the medical profession (and other health professions) perpetuate extreme ideals of youth and beauty?
13. How has ready access to cosmetic surgical procedures changed beauty expectations among women and men? Have wait-times for non-cosmetic plastic surgery changed?
14. What role can health professionals play to help patients build a healthy self-image and to help counter media/cultural pressures for certain ideals of beauty? What can you do?

Glossary of Medical Terms

Achilles’ Tendon – Fibrous tissue that connects the calf muscles (gastrocnemius and soleus) to the heel (calcaneus)

Bunion – An enlarged bump typically on the inner side of the forefoot (at the MTP joint) often produced by a combination of the lateral deviation of the big toe (hallux valgus) and the medial deviation of the first metatarsal causing the head of the bone to stick out. Also enlargement of the head of the first metatarsal and swelling of the overlying soft tissue can play a role

Hallux valgus – The lateral deviation of the big toe (bent toward the second toe)

Hammer Toes – Deformity of the second, third, fourth, or fifth toes involving a bending (flexion) of the middle joint caused by abnormalities of the soft tissue (ligaments and tendons). Mallet toe (flexion of the last joint) and claw toe (downward bending of the middle and last joint and upward bending of the first joint - MTP) can also occur after high heeled shoe wearing

Ligament – Fibrous tissue that connects bone to bone

Morton’s Neuroma – A thickening of the tissue around the digital nerve between bones in the ball of the foot (the metatarsal heads) that produces pain into the forefoot and toes

Plantar Fasciitis – Inflammation and painful irritation of the connective tissue in the sole of the foot from the heel (calcaneus) to the ball (the metatarsal heads)

Tendon – Fibrous tissue that connects muscle to bone

REFERENCES and RESOURCES

A. Ideals of beauty

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2. Media Awareness Network. This Canadian non-profit site has lots of information and lessons plans for various grade levels. In addition to the links listed try entering into the search field words like “stereotyping”, and “ideals of beauty” and “body image”
www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/stereotyping/women_and_girls/women_beauty.cfm
3. The Canadian Women’s Health Network has a section on body image and the media
www.cwhn.ca/node/40776

B. Footbinding

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5. See L. Snow Flower and the Secret Fan. A novel. Random House Trade Paperbacks, New York, 2005. The novel has details about footbinding. The 2011 film by the same name makes modern parallels to contemporary fashion and women's issues
6. See L. Shanghai Girls. Random House Trade Paperbacks, New York, 2009
7. Yang YQ. Footbinding: Search for the Three Inch Golden Lotus. East-West Film Enterprise, Ltd. 2003. This poignant Canadian documentary filmed primarily in China is available from Moving Images Distribution, Vancouver, Canada - www.movingimages.ca

C. High-heeled shoe wearing

1. American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons. If the shoe fits, wear it. A brochure which can be ordered by calling 1(800) 824-BONES. Or visit www.AAOS.org for further resources
2. American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society. www.aofas.org
3. Bata Shoe Museum, Toronto, Canada. This is their shoe of the month podcast: Skyscrapers. <http://www.batashoemuseum.ca/podcasts/200902/index.shtml>
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