Michelle McCrory is breaking down my favourite white sneakers. They are my newest Stan Smiths, a brand introduced to me by my husband, who has worn Stans for more than 40 years. The brand began as an athletic shoe named for tennis champion Stan Smith. Simple lines and classic design have made it iconic. Celebrities have collaborated with Adidas to put their spin on the look. It has been the shoe of choice for designers on the runway and in daily life. Last summer, I wore my Stans to work while recovering from a broken ankle. It’s hard to rock a kitten heel while in a cast and on crutches. I wore my sneakers with suits and cocktail dresses, starting great conversations among women looking for a stylish alternative to heels. Wearing only flat shoes was liberating. After talking with certified pedorthist Michelle McCrory, I now understand it was also much healthier. McCrory spread that word all the way to Quito, Ecuador, voluntarily delivering 25 hockey bags of used footwear.

The painful truth

High heels strain the knees, hips and back, squash the toes and cause corns and calluses — but there’s no need to sacrifice style for health.

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Certified pedorthist Michelle McCrory assessed this Stan Smith sneaker and liked its design features, including a removable insert and lots of support. She wishes fashion shoes were equally well designed.

1. Firm support behind the heel
2. Reinforcement between the sole and insole
3. Proper flex at the ball of the foot
4. Torsional stability (hard to “wring it out”)
5. Ability to adjust for comfort, support and stability

McCrory, a former basketball star at the University of Waterloo, has been a certified pedorthist for 25 years. She displays her footwear passion in her office at the Waterloo Sports Medicine Centre. A large painting of feet by co-worker Ann MacKenzie graces the wall. You can find a foot sculpture beside a piggy bank to fund new shoes. It’s the space of someone keen to spread the word about taking care of our feet. McCrory spread that word all the way to Quito, Ecuador, voluntarily delivering 25 hockey bags of used footwear.

Spend a few minutes with this mother of two daughters and you may stop wearing heels, or choose them more wisely. She sees the damage that can result and is quick to cite scary statistics: women experience foot problems four times more often than men; nine out of 10 women wear shoes that are too small.

Sports shoes are designed to provide support, cushion and stability while enhancing movement and performance. Athletic footwear designers consider variables such as composition of the terrain, body angles, multidirectional movement and stress to ankles and knees.

“Modern fashion footwear takes none of this into account,” McCrory says. “And so I choose, even for everyday wear, for the health of my feet, ankles and knees, to buy low heels, with a good heel counter (support) and a toe box, which fits the shape of my foot.” McCrory hasn’t banished heels from her daily wardrobe, but now they are low heels, with a good heel counter and toe box. She prefers to save her high heels for special occasions.

Photography • Declan Outhit
Problem Areas

**Ankles/Calves:** Instability causing falls, irritated ankles, tightened Achilles and shortened calf muscles

**Knees:** Knees absorb shocks. Wearing heels shifts the center of gravity forward, which in turn increases the load and impact on the inside of knees

**Hips/Back:** You are fitted forward and the spine must make compensations, such as hips thrusting forward and back arching

**Bunions:** High heels don’t cause bunions but can aggravate them

**Foot:** Corns, calluses, bunions, Morton’s neuroma, metatarsalgia, ingrown toenails, Haglund’s deformity (pump bump)

**Ankle/Feet:** The female walk is perceived as much more attractive when wearing high heels. It accentuates the length of your legs, making them look longer and thinner and more fit, while also exaggerating your booty and your bosom. Heels add height to your stature.

**But women risk major physical changes by sticking to their feet after age 20.”** McCrory says.

The female walk is perceived as much more attractive when wearing high heels. It accentuates the length of your legs, making them look longer and thinner and more fit, while also exaggerating your booty and your bosom. Heels add height to your stature.

“Women tend to think of their feet as a certain size, but as you get older and have babies, your feet tend to spread, both in length and width. Few women remeasure their feet after age 20.”

Women wear heels because they “exaggerate the particularly feminine aspects of gait,” McCrory says. “The female walk is perceived as much more attractive when wearing high heels.

Thick heels are made to the exact same shape as men’s. What’s better is the foot in the shoe, forcing the toes into the unnatural shape of the shoe and redistributing your weight incorrectly,” McCrory explains. "A one-inch heel is enough to tilt the body forward. You have to get the right-shaped container to match your foot shape. Most men’s shoes are made to the exact same shape as women’s, whereas women’s shoes almost never match the shape of the female foot. So if you squeeze your foot into such ill-fitting shoes, you are literally throwing your body out of alignment.

When you shop for shoes, remember that shoes are like a container for your feet. They must provide protection, support, cushion, function or comfort. They are best in public showers, at the beach or poolside.”

If you’re looking to get the best shoe, you should consider the time of day you shop. McCrory suggests trying on shoes in the afternoon to ensure the most comfortable fit. Your feet can be different sizes at different times and they swell after walking.

Coming Soon: Tonia Debellis • Desigual

**Other Brands Include:**

Brenda Beddome • Kapalua Zerres • Smash
Lisa Todd • Foxy

Jeff Dilllon • Foxy

See chart on next page.

"Because life is more fun when you look good."

Sashay-Done

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Joe Rickhoff

Michelle McCrory’s ‘shoe fund’ bank. And yes, there is some change in the bank.

Supine Michelle McCrory, Waterloo Sports Medicine Centre

A foot sculpture sits next to certified pedorthist Michelle McCrory’s ‘shoe fund’ bank. And yes, there is some change in the bank.