

Pumped Up: Heel Hop, the latest Fitness Trend

Holly J Coley | June 24, 2013 | Fitness



Photo Credit: Heel Hop Fitness

I've always appreciated a nice pair of heels. From the time I was six and saw a photo of my mother wearing red alligator wedged sandals on her size seven feet, I vowed I would one day travel the world in no less than three inches. And by the time I was twelve I began collecting whatever type of heel I could get my hands on, loving the way they made my legs appear longer, leaner and sexier.

So when I heard about the latest fitness trend- working out in Jimmy Choo instead of Nike -I understood the lure. Dance-centric classes like HEEL HOP are making headlines for helping women master their heels, while dropping lbs and toning up.

Kamilah Barrett, owner and creator of HEEL HOP, knows something about working it in high heels. Trained in ballet, jazz and hip hop (to name a few), she was a finalist on Fox's "So You Think You Can Dance", has been a dancer for Prince, and has appeared in videos for artist like 50 Cent and R. Kelly. Also a certified instructor, Barrett's impressive dance resume lead to record labels asking her to choreograph dance routines. She was surprised when she began noticing how many women had difficulty moving in their heels.

"I noticed a lack of balance and uncertainty the ladies had when dancing in heels," Barrett says. "Prior to seeing this, I had always assumed that all women knew how to move in heels. That's when I knew I had to come up with a way to make it easier for women to move in heels, so they can feel a sense of accomplishment and yet have fun at the same time."



HEEL HOP is a low-impact workout which centers around what Barrett calls the “Principles of C’s”: Core, Comfort and Confidence. Women are taken through routines that engage core muscles to help with weight distribution and spinal alignment. She teaches her students proper foot placement for wearing heels, which can help reduce shock and allow shoes to be worn for longer periods. Confidence comes when students become more comfortable moving in her shoes. Barrett suggests first time goes to wear 3-inch heels. As they gain more stability, they can graduate to higher. For those who can’t make it to a class in L.A., she has released HEEL HOP the DVD and the Heelhop.com has Weekly PUMP Ups, videos you can work out to at home.

Another class gaining buzz is Stiletto Fitness in Kansas City, MO. Creator, Coryelle Abney, describes her fifty minute class as “a high impact core and lower body workout, DIVA style!” The class includes stretching, walking and dancing. Ladies are taken through toning exercises that are geared to attack areas women gain weight. And while many do opt to wear heels, Abney doesn’t require them.

Like Barrett, Abney is a trained dancer and has felt the demands to keep her physique tight. “I was pressured to look a certain way during college and as an adult dancer,” she explains. “If I was not able to fit in my uniform I was not able to perform and would lose my scholarship.” Stiletto Fitness helps to strengthen ankle and calves, leading to more grace and coordination. Abney is working on plans to offer more classes, including ten minute core and lower body workouts.

There hasn't been much, if any, research on the benefits of working out in heels. And while sashaying in pumps sounds like a fun workout, some medical experts advise class-takers to approach such routines with caution. Podiatrist Dr Emily Splichal, who has a practice in Manhattan and West Chester, N.Y., knows a thing or two about foot health. With a series of workout DVDs (Catwalk Fitness & Stiletto Recovery) and a recently published *Everyday Is Your Runway: A Shoe Lover's Guide to Healthy Feet & Legs*, she understands the stress heels can put on joints.

“The human body is a fascinating, interconnected network of joints,” she explains. “When a woman stands in high heels all of her body weight is shifted forward onto the ball of the foot.

In order to remain upright with all the body weight on the ball of the foot, the back arches and the chest shifts forward. This shift in posture in heels puts increased stress to the lower back, the knees, the ankles and the ball of the foot. This is increased stress to the joints can lead to early-onset arthritis and chronic pain in the joints.” Those working out in heels risk injuries like ankle sprains. Knee arthritis and low back pain are also things to consider. Any moves that put excessive stress on joints like squatting or lunging is not recommended.

Both HEEL HOP and Stiletto Fitness spend a portion of class working on flexibility and foot placement. And Barrett has created modifications that can be done for those who have ankle or knee issues. But whether or not you decide to give the workouts a go, there are some must-know moves to add to your repertoire if you're a heel wearer. Dr. Splichal, whose latest DVD series, VCore® Workout, designed to sculpt long, lean muscles and strengthen the legs, glutes and core, has tips all heel wearing should commit to memory.

Dr. Splichal Tips

1. If you are going to wear high heels, you must recover! This includes standing on golf balls, stretching your calves and stretching your hip flexors.
2. If you are going to wear high heels for more than a couple hours, try to avoid higher than 3 inches heels. For every inch over 3", stress to the body rapidly increases.
3. Integrate core training as part of your workout as this will help protect excessive low back strain when standing in heels. Whether you wear heels everyday or not, stretching the feet everyday is imperative!