



THINK TWICE

Non-leather shoes are bad for your feet

Prices for genuine leather shoes dangle dangerously above budget, and the Payless store around the corner looks very tempting. Especially where kids' shoes are concerned, the high price tag of leather and the short life-cycle of footwear make a parent — and a wallet — cringe.

But we've been raised with the belief that synthetic shoes are just not worth buying. Were our mothers hijacked by the marketing campaigns of leather manufacturers, or does their synthetic stigma hold water under closer analysis?

Dr. Michael Perlstein, a Brooklyn-based podiatrist, has been seeing the effects of leather vs. synthetic shoes on the feet of his patients for twenty years. He points out that leather is a porous material; like human skin, it features thousands of tiny pores to enable it to breathe. The natural air flow works to reduce sweating and its nasty byproduct, foot odor. Leather also has elastic properties that enable it to mold to the shape of the wearer's foot and to stretch over time, making the shoe more comfortable and longer lasting. When cowboys roamed the Wild West, their practice was to soak new leather boots in the river, then wear the wet boots for three consecutive days, allowing the leather to take on the shape of their feet. This must be why our children splash endlessly in puddles and then walk around with wet shoes for the rest of the day!

Man-made shoes are, well, man-made. They don't have the breathability of leather, although manufacturers like DuPont have incorporated pore-like holes into synthetic shoe fabric. The reduced porosity spells trouble, in the form of fungus, foot odor, and sweating. But perhaps a bigger drawback is the stiffness of the man-made shoe; there's no give in the material, which means that even daily wear won't break in those spots that chafe. Dr. Perlstein observes that patients with hammertoes or bunions suffer particularly from synthetic shoes because they are not supple. Note that patent leather is actually coated with plastic, negating the advantages of the leather underneath.

The verdict: Synthetic shoes might pay if your feet are low maintenance or the shoes aren't for daily wear, but leather is the way to go if you're looking for quality, comfort, and reduced podiatric problems.

TAKE TEN

10 things you NEVER TELL Your Husband

1. Oh — you mean that funny-looking piece of plastic with wires? I threw it out last week.
2. There's a clearance sale at Home Depot.
3. I've decided to start cooking vegetarian.
4. You know that light fixture you spent all day hanging? Just wanted to tell you it's crooked.
5. Pesh's husband bought her a three-carat anniversary ring after her fourth.
6. Let's take a look at the house for sale next door to my parents.
7. Wanna hear something funny? All morning I drove around not realizing that I had forgotten to fully release the emergency brake!
8. What's our maximum credit limit?
9. Oh, your hat? I sent it with Yanky. He's the Shabbos Abba this week.
10. Wait for me outside. Don't worry — I'm coming in a minute.