

## How to walk like Carrie Bradshaw

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Staff Reporter

Marilyn Monroe put her faith in the Spring-O-Lator.

A leather-like elastic strap in her high heels added spring to her step, relieving some of the weight from the balls of her feet.



LUCAS OLENIUK/TORONTO STAR

Toronto's Marion Harris prefers a less technical approach. She runs a "boot camp" that helps women learn to walk well in stilettos.

Marion Harris of Toronto's Feldenkrais Centre teaches a class on how to walk in high heels.

When dressing up, the 79-year-old still dons four-inch heels and manages a fluid, graceful stride.

High heels damage the feet, she acknowledges. They cramp the toes, punish the metatarsals, shorten the calf muscles, and risk injuring the knees and lower back.

But they are also sexy.

"My aim is not to promote high heels," Harris says of her High Heels Boot Camp. "But the girls are going to wear them anyway and they might as well learn how to walk in them."

Harris teaches a movement-awareness technique called the Feldenkrais Method, developed in the 1940s by Ukrainian-born Moshe Feldenkrais.

Harris trained directly under Feldenkrais at Amherst College, Mass., beginning in 1980 and founded her Toronto Feldenkrais Centre in 1983. Among other skills she teaches how to walk — not only with feet and legs, but also with pelvis, ribs and shoulders.

"Walking is an act of the entire body," Harris says sashaying gently in her chair to help make the point.

"Some women hold themselves rigid," she says, "first of all because their posture might not be very good in the first place and because being on high heels makes them unsure of themselves."

For high-heel initiates, Harris offers three starting tips:

- **Buy a good shoe.** A good one cushions the ball of the foot, which takes most of the weight, and cradles the foot for a more even weight distribution than otherwise. "High-heeled sandals, with little straps around the toes," she says, "give absolutely no support."
- **Start low.** "Today, the girls are going from flip-flops and sandals to five-inch heels. It's insanity. Women of my generation started at an earlier age. We started with lower heels and gradually worked our way up."
- **Use sparingly.** "Women would be smart to wear walking shoes to work and change into their heels for the evening."

Although never out of style, high heels faded in the '60s and '70s, Harris says, and went gangbusters again with the 1998 TV debut of *Sex and the City*.

"The girls saw these beautiful clothes and of course these high heels," she says of the sensation. "But of course Sarah Jessica Parker (as Carrie Bradshaw) is a dancer. She's probably worn high heels since she was a teenager."

At her periodic workshops, Harris takes students through a series of exercises and meditations.

The day ends with graduates strutting down a red carpet to a DJ remix of "Stayin' Alive."

"It's certainly better to learn how to walk properly in heels (than not)," says Toronto podiatrist Hartley Miltchin, who owns Monroe's Spring-O-Lator shoes as part his celebrity shoe collection. "But there is always going to be physical damage by walking in heels."

"You've got to mix it up," adds podiatrist Robert Chelin. "Vary the heel height and wear flats on other days."

Harris's next High Heels Boot Camp runs Mon., Nov. 1. For details check [www.feldenkraiscentre.com](http://www.feldenkraiscentre.com).

### **Foot exercise**

1. Place one hand lightly on a chair or countertop to the side.
2. Stand in bare feet, hips-width apart and parallel.
3. Slowly rise onto the balls of the feet, as high as you can. Do not flex at the ankles.
4. Hold position for several seconds. Keep toes flat, not curled.
5. Slowly descend, returning to standing position.
6. Repeat 6-8 times.