

Chicago Tribune

LIFESTYLES

Fact: Fashion is out to get you

February 13, 2013 | By Kristyn Schiavone, Tribune Media Services | Simple Style



Fashion-forward ballet flats designed for maximum comfort, available at Pluggz.com. (Pluggz)

Sure, you look fabulous, but the folks behind the style steering wheels don't give two shakes about your comfort. If you're following my advice about how your clothes should fit then hopefully that won't happen, but I bet you didn't know that preventing plumber's bum was actually a life or death situation.

The last time fashion tried to kill me was approximately four days ago. I was running for the bus in my heeled boots on the slushy, "wintery mixed" streets of Chicago, and wiped out rounding the bend. And I mean really wiped out. I still have the bruises. I'm sure you've all gathered that I'm not the world's most graceful individual, but I think the impact would probably have been mitigated if I had been wearing, oh I don't know, snow boots or some other practical, ugly footwear.

That's the problem. "Functional fashion" is the worst. The very phrase should make you shudder, since it's the phrase that justifies atrocities like Crocs and pajama jeans. And in general, your day clothes should not be as comfortable as PJs. However, lots of people have real reasons for being unable to wear certain trends or types of clothing, so I've dedicated this week's column to finding that rare items that is both functional and cute.

It's a dirty job, especially when you actually fall into a puddle. But someone's gotta do it.

Problem: Your feet can't take 5-inch heels.

Solution: There are many reasons why you may not be able to traipse around in Lady Gaga-style footwear. Perhaps you have an occupation that requires you to be on your feet

all day, or a medical ailment that requires comfortable footwear. Despite the fact that this is a common problem, the shoe options are limited.

If you have one of those medical problems, such as bunions or arthritis, you may not be able to wear heels at all, and flats are likely difficult because they don't offer any arch support. Enter Pluggz, which carries a line of trendy two-tone, cap-toe ballet flats with an insole designed to replicate the feel of walking on grass or sand. The company refers to it as "grounding," which happens when you absorb the Earth's energy. These may or may not give you more energy, but between the insole and the slight heel for support, they're stylish with some functional benefits.

Maybe you're technically fine to wear heels but don't prefer the feeling that your feet are going to fall off. Spend a little more to get a nice pair of pumps with an athletic shoe insole. My Cole Haan "interview shoes" have a Nike insole.

Problem: Your winter coat is really warm, but also you look like a marshmallow.

Solution: This one is easy to fix -- find a puffy coat with a belt. Here in Chicago, the one thing we don't skimp on is outerwear. It may be ugly, but if it works with the weather, we don't care. A down-filled coat, belted at the waist, that hits somewhere between your butt and mid-thighs length-wise, works even for dressy occasions.

Problem: You'd like to be able to sit comfortably in your office all day.

Solution: Step away from the jeggings. You don't need to go full-on, pajama-style stretch here, or buy your pants eight sizes too big. For jeans, Joe's Jeans' "The Skinny" in stretch denim still look like a regular pair of jeans, with just enough give to accommodate a few pounds gained from an indulgent weekend. J.Crew's Minnie pants are the perfect thing if you work in a more formal office. They're cotton blend cigarette pants that aren't too tight, so they look chic but are easy to wear.

Problem: Your back can't handle your work tote anymore.

Solution: I love a bag with a removable satchel strap. If you're traveling, wear the bag cross-body to distribute the weight evenly. But if you're just jumping into the car to go to an appointment, you can carry it by the handles for a totally different look.

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