

From Poison Green Dresses to Corsets: History's Most Medically Hazardous Fashion Trends

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Medically Hazardous Fashion Trends From History

Fashion has always been a mirror of beauty, status, and identity. But while today's trends lean toward comfort and inclusivity, history reveals a darker side: some styles were not just uncomfortable but genuinely **life-threatening**. From toxic fabrics to bone-crushing shoes, here are fashion's deadliest statements.

1. Tightlacing Corsets

From the 16th to the 19th century, women laced themselves into rigid corsets to achieve an impossibly tiny waistline. While admired for creating the coveted hourglass figure, tightlacing compressed internal organs, restricted breathing, and sometimes caused fainting spells. Extreme use even led to permanent anatomical damage.

2. Poison-Green Dresses

In the 19th century, bright emerald fabrics were dyed with arsenic pigments. While beautiful under candlelight, prolonged exposure caused **arsenic poisoning**, leading to sores, nausea, and even death. Some Victorian ghost stories are believed to have originated from lingering arsenic residues in abandoned clothing.

3. Foot Binding in Imperial China

Perhaps one of the most excruciating practices in fashion history, young girls had their feet tightly bound to create "lotus feet." Broken bones, infections, and lifelong disabilities followed. The painful ritual reinforced ideals of beauty while also limiting women's independence.

4. Crinoline Fires

Crinolines, cage-like understructures used to give skirts dramatic volume in the 1800s, turned women into walking fire hazards. Highly flammable and often several feet wide, these skirts frequently caught fire from nearby candles or fireplaces, with tragic consequences.

5. Belladonna Eye Drops

During the Renaissance, wide, dilated pupils were seen as seductive. Women used belladonna (deadly nightshade) eye drops to achieve the look—at the cost of blurred vision, hallucinations, and in some cases, permanent blindness. Ironically, women often carried parasols indoors to shield themselves from light sensitivity.

6. Chopines: The Ankle-Breakers

In 15th–17th-century Europe, aristocratic women flaunted their wealth with towering chopine shoes, sometimes over 20 inches tall. While these elevated platforms were status symbols, they made walking nearly impossible. Sprains, falls, and fractures were common—and many women required servants just to help them walk.

Fashion Then vs. Now

What we consider discomfort today—tight jeans, pinching heels, or underwires—is mild compared to history’s **medically hazardous trends**. Fashion has evolved to be safer and more inclusive, but these cautionary tales remind us of the dangerous lengths society once went to in the name of beauty.

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