

Education

Bunion (Hallux Valgus)

What is a bunion?

A bunion is an abnormal bony bump that forms on the joint at the base of the big toe. The big toe joint becomes enlarged and the big toe points toward the other toes. The medical term for the deformity where the big toe angles toward the other toes is hallux valgus.

People with weak or flat feet and women who wear high heels a lot tend to develop bunions.

How does it occur?

Bunions can result from wearing shoes that don't fit properly or from wearing high-heeled shoes with narrow, pointed toes. When a shoe rubs against the toe joint it irritates the area and makes it swollen, red, and painful. A tough, calloused covering grows over the site.

The tendency to have bunions may be inherited.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include:

- a bony bump at the base of the big toe
- swelling, redness, and soreness of the big toe joint
- thickening of the skin at the base of the big toe.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will examine the affected foot. He or she may want to take x-rays of the joint.

How is it treated?

Often nonsurgical treatment is sufficient. You can usually relieve pressure on the big toe by:

- wearing roomy, comfortable shoes
- wearing a corrective device that pushes the big toe back into the right position and holds it in place
- placing a pad on the bunion.

In addition, take anti-inflammatory medicine (such as aspirin or ibuprofen) for pain relief. Custom-made arch supports called orthotics may help reduce bunion pain.

If the bunion gets worse and causes too much discomfort, your health care provider may suggest surgery (called bunionectomy) to:

- straighten the toe by taking out part of the bone
- permanently join the bones of the affected joint.

How long will the effects last?

A bunion is a permanent problem. You'll continue to have it unless you have surgery to remove it. Recovery from bunion surgery may take 2 months or more.

How can I take care of myself?

If you have swelling, redness, or pain in the big toe joint:

- Keep pressure off the affected toe.
- Wear comfortable shoes that fit well and allow enough room for your toes.
- See your health care provider or a foot specialist if your condition doesn't improve or if new symptoms develop.
- Follow your health care provider's instructions for taking prescribed medicine.

What can be done to help prevent bunions?

You can help prevent bunions from developing by wearing comfortable shoes that fit well. Be sure your shoes don't cramp or irritate your toes. This is especially important if your family has a history of weak or flat feet, conditions that may be inherited.

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