

# HAMMERTOE

## What Is Hammertoe?

Hammertoe is a contracture—or bending—of one or both joints of the second, third, fourth, or fifth (little) toes. This abnormal bending can put pressure on the toe when wearing shoes, causing problems to develop. Common symptoms of hammertoes include:

- Pain or irritation of the affected toe when wearing shoes.
- Corns (a buildup of skin) on the top, side, or end of the toe, or between two toes. Corns are caused by constant friction against the shoe. They may be soft or hard, depending upon their location.
- Calluses (another type of skin buildup) on the bottom of the toe or on the ball of the foot.

Corns and calluses can be painful and make it difficult to find a comfortable shoe. But even without corns and calluses, hammertoes can cause pain because the joint itself may become dislocated.

Hammertoes usually start out as mild deformities and get progressively worse over time. In the earlier stages, hammertoes are flexible and the symptoms can often be managed with noninvasive measures. But if left untreated, hammertoes can become more rigid and will not respond to non-surgical treatment. Corns are more likely to develop as time goes on—and corns never really go away, even after trimming. In more severe cases of hammertoe, open sores may form.

Because of the progressive nature of hammertoes, they should receive early attention. Hammertoes never get better without some kind of intervention.

## What Causes Hammertoe?

The most common cause of hammertoe is a muscle/tendon imbalance.

This imbalance, which leads

to a bending of the toe, results from mechanical (structural) changes in the foot that occur over time in some people.

Hammertoes are often aggravated by shoes that don't fit properly—for example, shoes that crowd the toes. And in some cases, ill-fitting shoes can actually cause the contracture that defines hammertoe. For example, a hammertoe may develop if a toe is too long and is forced into a cramped position when a tight shoe is worn.



## Treatment:

### Non-Surgical Approaches

There are a variety of treatment options for hammertoe. The treatment your podiatric foot and ankle surgeon selects will depend upon the severity of your hammertoe and other factors. A number of non-surgical measures can be undertaken:

- **Trimming corns and calluses.**
- **Padding corns and calluses.**
- **Changes in shoe gear**
- **Injection therapy**
- **Splinting or strapping**

### When is Surgery Needed?

In some cases surgery is needed to relieve the pain and discomfort caused by the deformity. The most common surgical procedure performed to correct a hammertoe is called an arthroplasty. In this procedure, the surgeon removes a small section of the bone from the affected joint.

It is possible the patient may require other procedures as well—especially when the hammertoe condition is severe.