

HAMMERTOES

What Is Hammertoe / Mallet Toe?

Hammertoe is a bending deformity of one or both joints of the second, third, fourth or fifth toes. This abnormal bending can put pressure on the toe when wearing shoes, causing problems to develop.

Hammertoes usually start out as mild deformities and get progressively worse over time. In the earlier stages, hammertoes are flexible but they can become quite rigid and painful.

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



Causes:

The most common cause of hammertoe is a muscle/tendon imbalance that results in some muscles being stronger and causing a deforming force.

Hammertoes may be aggravated by shoes that are too short. A hammertoe may result if a toe is too long and is forced into a cramped position when a tight shoe is worn. Occasionally, hammertoe is the result of an earlier trauma to the toe. In some people, hammertoes are inherited.

Symptoms:

Common symptoms of hammertoes include:

- Pain or irritation of the affected toe when wearing shoes.

- Corns and calluses on the toe, between two toes or on the ball of the foot. Corns are caused by constant friction against the shoe. They may be soft or hard, depending on their location. They may even form small ulcers.
- Inflammation, redness or a burning sensation

Diagnosis:

Although hammertoes are readily apparent, the surgeon needs to check if the deformity is correctable. Also he needs to assess the foot in its entirety to determine if there are other deformities that may contribute to the problem.

Hammertoes are progressive—they do not go away by themselves and usually they will get worse over time.

Treatment:

There is a variety of treatment options for hammertoe.

- **Padding corns and calluses.** There are a number of pads designed to shield corns from irritation. They will need to be used continuously and changed regularly.
- **Changes in footwear.** Avoid shoes with pointed toes, shoes that are too short, or shoes with high heels—conditions that can force your toe against the front of the shoe. Instead, choose comfortable shoes with a deep, roomy toebox and heels that are not too high.
- **Orthotic devices.** A custom orthotic device placed in your shoe may help control the muscle/tendon imbalance. Splints and straps can also work in the early stages.
- **Medications.** Oral nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, may be recommended to reduce pain and inflammation.
- **Surgery:** If a hammertoe is rigid, painful or develops an ulcer then surgery is recommended. There are several procedures which the surgeon will discuss with you.

References:

www.foothealthfacts.org

www.aofas.org

Pictures: Google images