



Bunions and hammertoes

A bunion is a bony bump that develops at the base of the big toe joint on the side of the foot. It is caused by swelling in the bursa, a fluid-filled sac that is supposed to cushion the bone. The bump can grow slowly larger over time and cause the big toe to turn in toward the second toe.

A hammertoe is a toe that bends up at the middle joint. Hammertoes typically worsen and become more rigid over time, particularly if left untreated.

Causes

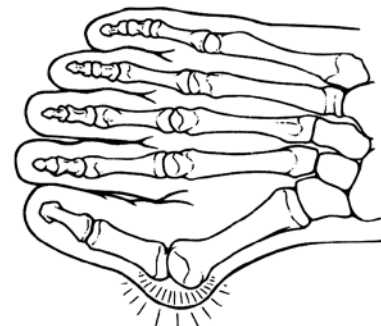
In most cases, the shape or structure of your foot is the primary cause of both conditions. Because

the shape of the foot is determined by genetics, these conditions sometimes run in families. Both conditions are usually aggravated by wearing shoes that are too short, narrow, or high heeled.

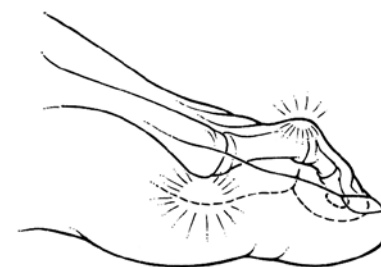
Prevention

Proper footwear can help reduce the risk of bunions.

- Wear shoes that give your toes plenty of room to spread out. Make sure that your shoes fit properly.
- Wear shoes with a low or flat heel. Avoid high-heeled shoes, which put more pressure on the big toe (metatarsophalangeal) joint.
- Excessive foot pronation (rolling in or flattening at the arch) may be related to bunion formation. Foot orthotics (custom-made shoe inserts) can help to control foot pronation and may slow down or prevent bunions from getting bigger. Orthotics may also be helpful in reducing or eliminating the pain associated with bunions. However, they should not be expected to reverse or improve the bunion or alignment of your big toe.
- Stretch the parts of your shoes that rub on painful areas. Look for a shoe repair shop that stretches shoes, or ask your health care professional to recommend one.



A bunion is a swelling caused by a misshapen joint at the base of the big toe.



A hammertoe is a toe that bends up permanently at the middle joint.

Home treatment

Once you have a bunion or hammertoe, there is usually no way to completely get rid of it. The good news is that home treatment will help keep these conditions from getting worse.

- Wear low-heeled, roomy shoes that have good arch support.
- Wear comfortable sandals or shoes around the house that don't press on the area.

Bunions, Hammertoes, and Ingrown Toenails

- Cushion the bunion or hammertoe with moleskin or donut-shaped pads to prevent rubbing and irritation. Ask your local pharmacy for pads made specifically for bunions.
- Try aspirin, ibuprofen, or acetaminophen to relieve pain. Ice or cold packs may also help.

Surgery, as a last option, may be helpful if home treatment does not relieve pain. There are different types of surgery for bunions and hammertoes. Ask your doctor which surgery is best for you.

Call Kaiser Permanente if:

- You have sudden, severe pain in the big toe.
- Pain does not respond to home treatment in two to three weeks.
- Severe pain interferes with walking or daily activities.
- The big toe begins to overlap the second toe.
- You see signs of infection such as spreading redness, increased swelling, severe pain or drainage. Irritated skin over a bunion or hammertoe can lead to serious infections in people with diabetes or poor circulation.

Ingrown toenails

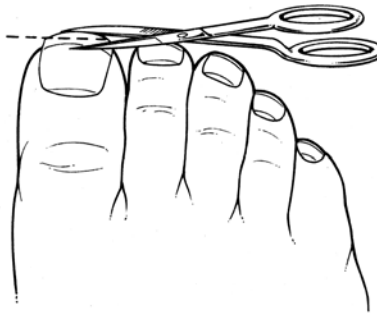
An ingrown toenail is a nail that grows into and cuts the skin at the edge of the nail. Because the cut can easily become infected, prompt care is needed.

Causes

There are many possible causes of ingrown toenails. Wearing shoes that are too tight or cutting the toenail too short are both frequent causes. A tendency to get ingrown toenails may sometimes be hereditary. Nail conditions, such as a fungal infection or trauma to the nail can also cause the nail to grow improperly.

Prevention

- Cut toenails straight across so the edges cannot cut into the skin. Leave the nails a little longer at the corners so that the sharp ends don't cut into the skin.



Cut toenails straight across.

- Wear roomy shoes and keep your feet clean and dry.

Home treatment

- Soak your foot in warm water for 15 minutes 3 to 4 times a day to help relieve swelling or tenderness while toenails grow out.

- Wedge a small piece of wet cotton under the corner of the nail to cushion the nail and keep it from cutting the skin.
- Repeat home care daily until the nail has grown out and can be trimmed.
- Don't apply over-the-counter antibiotic ointments because they can slow down drainage of the ingrown nail.

Call Kaiser Permanente if:

- Signs of infection develop, including:
 - increased pain, swelling, redness, or tenderness
 - heat or red streaks extending from the area
 - discharge of pus
 - fever of 101 degrees or higher with no other cause
- You have diabetes or circulatory problems

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.