

The pressure of calluses

Our feet play an important role in getting us around. When we walk or stand, our feet carry the burden of our body weight, as well as bearing the various pressures of movement and the constraints of footwear.

Sometimes, pressure placed on the foot becomes out of balance and extra friction falls on particular areas of the foot. When this happens, the body may respond to the pressure by producing thickenings in the surface layer of the skin. These hard patches of skin are called **calluses** and are part of the body's defense system to protect the underlying tissues. If the cause of pressure is not relieved, calluses become painful.

... and corns

If pressure becomes concentrated in a small area, a 'hard' **corn** may develop. Sometimes the pressure of the corn or callus may produce inflammation which can result in acute pain, swelling and redness.

Sometimes 'soft' corns may form between the toes where the skin is moist from sweat or inadequate drying. These appear white and rubbery and are also caused by excessive friction.

Corns and calluses are most often found on the balls of the feet or the tops of toes. They can also be found on heels and even along the sides of toenails.

What causes calluses and corns?

Calluses and corns are generally symptoms of underlying problems and in some cases, early warning signals of more complex foot disorders. Because they are caused by continuous pressure in one particular area, they may indicate abnormalities or deformity in bone structure or in the way a person walks.

Often calluses and corns are caused by ill-fitting or inappropriate footwear.

Who gets calluses and corns?

Almost everyone! In fact, calluses and corns affect more people than any other kind of foot problem.

Some people have a natural tendency to develop calluses because of their skin type. For instance, elderly people have less fatty tissue and elasticity in their feet and because of a lack of padding, calluses may form on the bottom of the foot. Also, people who work in occupations that require them to spend a lot of time on their feet are prone to developing calluses.

How to treat calluses and corns

The most important thing to remember about treating calluses and corns is never do it yourself without seeing a specialist first. Because calluses are generally symptoms of other problems, it is important to have a podiatrist examine your feet to work out what could be causing the pressure.

Over-the-counter remedies such as corn paint or plasters generally only treat the symptoms – not the problem.

Also, they can easily damage the healthy skin surrounding the corn if not used properly. Commercial preparations should only be used following professional advice.

Warning!

It is important that you never cut corns or calluses yourself. In the warm, moist confines of enclosed shoes, infection can easily develop and small cuts can quickly become serious wounds.

Seeing your podiatrist

Your podiatrist will not only recommend ways to relieve pain and get rid of the corn or callus, but can also help with isolating the cause and preventing the problem recurring.

To treat painful corns, your podiatrist will gently remove some of the hard skin of the callus so that the centre of the corn can be removed.

To allow the callus to heal and prevent future cases, your podiatrist may redistribute pressure on the foot with soft padding and strapping or deflective appliances that fit easily into your shoes. For corns on the toes, small foam wedges are useful for relieving pressure on affected parts. For older patients suffering from calluses on the soles of the feet, extra shock absorption for the ball of the foot can help to compensate for loss of natural padding.

Common sites of corn and callus formation, including the ball of the foot, under the big toe, tips and tops of toes and between the toes. The presence of a central 'core' suggests a corn has formed.



Your podiatrist may also discuss the type of footwear most likely to cause corns and calluses. In some cases, special shoe inserts (orthoses) may be prescribed to reduce excessive weight bearing forces on the foot and provide long-term relief.

Preventing corns and calluses and caring for your feet

The best way to prevent the development of calluses and corns is to pay attention to your feet when you feel there is extra pressure on specific areas. Properly fitting shoes are essential, especially if you spend long periods of time on your feet and it is important that you never wear others' shoes. A moisturiser used daily, will help to keep your skin supple. But don't forget that these problems are caused by pressure. If you feel you may be developing a callus or corn, or you already have one, the best thing to do is seek professional advice and treatment from your local podiatrist.

About podiatrists

Podiatrists are highly skilled health professionals trained to deal with the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of medical and surgical conditions of the feet and lower limbs. Podiatrists have completed a Bachelor of Podiatry or higher degree, and are continually upgrading their skills and

knowledge through further education and training.

Regular visits to your podiatrist can help prevent foot problems, alleviate pain, and help keep you on your feet and mobile.

Where can I find a podiatrist?

Refer to your Yellow Pages[™] for podiatrists who are members of the Australian Podiatry Association or the New Zealand Society of Podiatrists.

Many health funds in Australia and New Zealand provide cover for podiatry services on their ancillary tables and government funded services are available through the Department of Veterans' Affairs, some public hospitals and community health centres.

*This information is not to be used as a substitute for podiatric or medical assistance.

My podiatrist is:



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