

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 healthcare 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 (adults aged 65 years and older should not take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicine for more than 7 days without their healthcare provider's approval). Custom-made arch supports called orthotics may help reduce bunion pain.

If the bunion gets worse and causes too much discomfort, your healthcare 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?

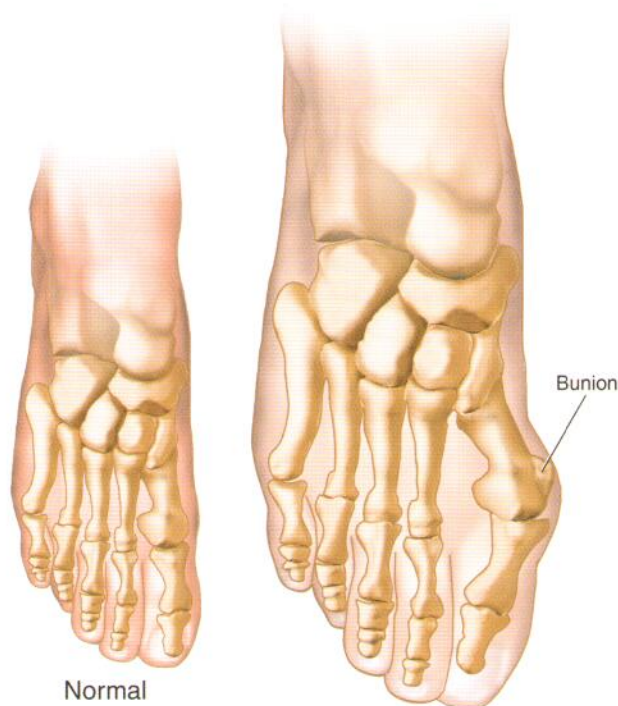
If you have swelling, redness, or pain in the big toe joint, you should do the following:

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

BUNION REMOVAL (BUNIONECTOMY)

What is bunion removal?

Bunion removal, called a bunionectomy, is a procedure in which the doctor removes a swelling or thickening on your big toe joint called a bunion. The doctor may also straighten your toe if necessary.

When is it used?

This procedure is used when a bunion makes walking painful.

Examples of alternatives are to:

- Wear different shoes.
- Wear a thick felt ring around the bunion to relieve pressure.
- Choose not to have treatment, accepting your present condition.

You should ask your doctor about these choices.

How do I prepare for a bunionectomy?

Plan for your care and recovery after the operation. Allow for time to rest and try to find people to help you with your day-to-day duties.

Follow any instructions your doctor may give you. Eat a light meal, such as soup or salad, the night before the procedure. Do not eat or drink anything after midnight and the morning before the procedure. Do not even drink coffee, tea, or water.

What happens during the procedure?

You will be given general anesthesia to relax your muscles and make you feel as if you are in a deep sleep. It will prevent you from feeling pain during the operation. The doctor makes a cut over the bump in your toe, cuts off the bump, and puts the toe in a more normal position. The doctor may have to make more than one cut, and may have to cut the bone in the toe to reposition it. After the procedure, the doctor closes the cut.

What happens after the procedure?

- You will limit your walking for 2 or more weeks.
- You may go home the same day or you may stay in the hospital for a day, depending on your condition.
- You will probably wear a brace, special shoe, or cast to help support the toe and foot.
- Your toe may be painful for a few months.

Ask your doctor what steps you should take and when you should come back for a checkup.

What are the benefits of this procedure?

Walking will be more comfortable, your shoes may fit better, and your toe won't hurt.

What are the risks associated with this procedure?

There are some risks when you have general anesthesia. Discuss these risks with your doctor.

- The bunion may grow back.
- The nerves and arteries in the affected area could be damaged.
- Your toe could lose its blood supply.
- Infection and bleeding may occur.
- Your toe may be stiff.

You should ask your doctor how these risks apply to you.

When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor immediately if:

- you develop a fever
- you can't control the pain
- you develop excessive bleeding

Call the doctor during office hours if:

- you have questions about the procedure or its result
- you want to make another appointment