

Hammertoes

A Hammertoe is a deformity of the second, third, or fourth toes. In this condition, the toe is bent at the middle joint, causing it to resemble a hammer. Left untreated, hammertoes can become inflexible and require surgery. People with hammertoes may have corns or calluses on the top of the middle joint of the toe or on the tip of the toe because of the friction between the top of the toe and the shoe. They may also feel pain in their toes or feet and have difficulty finding comfortable shoes.

Causes of hammertoe include improperly fitting shoes, (shoes are not a real cause of hammertoes but are certainly an aggravating factor), and muscle imbalance, which may be caused by the way you walk. Another cause can be genetic where the condition has been passed on from your parents. If they have curled toes, you are more likely to develop the problem. When patients wear shoes that are too small or shoes that squeeze toes into tight positions, high heels, or very pointed shoes, the muscles in the toe cannot fully extend and therefore become shortened. This most often occurs with excessively high heels, small shoes, and shoes with narrow toe boxes. It's not uncommon for a patient to experience bunions as well as hammertoes because both of them are often caused by ill-fitting footwear. Finding the proper fit is important to preventing conditions like hammertoes from developing. If you walk and your feet roll inward (pronation) this causes an abnormal pulling of the tendons that end in the toes, causing them to pull the toe into a contracted state thus causing the hammertoes. Over time the toe may become fixed in this bent position causing increased pain and deformity.

Treatment for the condition typically involves wearing shoes with soft, roomy toe boxes and engaging in physical therapy toe exercises to stretch and strengthen the muscles. Commercially available straps, cushions, or non-medicated corn pads may also relieve symptoms. The ultimate goal is to get the toes back in a normal position where they can naturally go straight. Often times functional orthotic devices can be made to wear in the shoes to eliminate the abnormal rolling in of the feet and reduce a flexible hammertoe deformity.

In some severe cases, the deformity is so far along that conservative treatments like physical therapy and footwear changes, padding and periodic removal of the corns, will not eliminate pain. In these cases, hammertoe surgery may be recommended to correct the deformity.

However bad your condition is, Dr. Harvey Danciger can help you through it. Dr. Danciger loves to help his patients get back to their normal schedule while feeling great. If you suspect your hammertoes need treatment or are simply wondering if you have hammertoes, please call his office at (760) 568-0108.