



BACKGROUND: Hammertoe is a deformity of one or both joints of the second, third, fourth or little toes. When wearing shoes, an abnormal bending can put pressure on the toe, causing problems to develop. Hammertoes usually start out very mild and get progressively worse over time. In the earlier stages, hammertoes are flexible, and the symptoms can often be managed with noninvasive measures. However, if left untreated, hammertoes can become stiffer and will not respond to nonsurgical treatment. Shoes that are too small, too tight, or just do not fit properly can aggravate hammertoes. Occasionally, hammertoe is the result of an earlier trauma to the toe, and in some people, hammertoes are inherited.

(Source: <https://www.foothealthfacts.org/conditions/hammertoe>)

SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENT: Some common symptoms of hammertoes include pain or irritation of the affected toe when wearing shoes; corns and calluses on the toe; inflammation, redness or a burning sensation; contracture of the toe; and in more severe cases, open sores. The treatment your foot and ankle surgeon select will depend on the severity of your hammertoe and some other factors. A surgeon can provide or prescribe pads designed to shield corns from irritation. Try to avoid shoes with pointed toes, shoes that are too short, or shoes with high heels, all that force your toe against the front of the shoe. A custom orthotic device placed in your shoe can sometimes help control the muscle/tendon imbalance. Corticosteroid injections are sometimes used to ease pain and inflammation. Finally, oral nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, may be recommended to reduce pain and inflammation, along with splinting or strapping.

(Source: <https://www.foothealthfacts.org/conditions/hammertoe>)

WHEN IT COMES TO SURGERY: The only time surgery is an absolute necessity is if your bunion or hammertoe becomes infected or involves a more troublesome complication. In order to correct the problem, you need someone who understands that they need to correct the bony deformity, and also the forces that caused the deformation. This process is a complicated one that very few surgeons understand. After surgery, a dressing is placed on the toe and you are given a post-operative shoe, which is a hard-soled shoe. The next day, you can walk on the heel and the outside of the foot, but it is recommended that you avoid putting weight on the part that was operated on for about three to four weeks. You may also have pins sticking out of the end of your toes that will need to be cleaned. Crutches may be provided for additional support to help you avoid putting weight on the part that was operated on. After four weeks, you can start walking more flat-footed and independently off of the crutches. Any pins will be removed at that time. Then at about six to eight weeks, you can wear shoes.

(Source: <https://www.keckmedicine.org/when-should-you-consider-surgery-for-a-bunion-or-hammertoe/>)

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