

Patient Information

One of the goals of our patient information link is to further educate you on your possible foot condition. In no way is this medical advice or the exact treatment you may receive. Your condition may be different or your condition and may require a different procedure or treatment plan. Through this site, you will find a wealth of information about foot disorders, treatments available, exercises and shoes. There is an overview of our practice including Dr. Gerard A. Skaziak's biography, office hours, insurance and appointment procedures, maps, directions and contact information.

As a licensed podiatrist Alabama, Dr. Gerard A. Skaziak believes his patients deserve to have the information needed to make good choices about their foot care. Our goal is to educate each patient and begin a relevant treatment program.

We take pride in providing you with a comfortable office experience. Our staff is friendly and will ensure a pleasant visit. Our two offices are located in Guntersville and Albertville. We invite you to call our office with any questions or concerns you may have. We are not a walk in clinic so please call and make an appointment. Both the Guntersville and Albertville offices have on-site x-rays so you won't have to wait for hours in an emergency room. We provide hospital and office based podiatric surgery as well as surgery in our Guntersville surgical suite. **Dr. Skaziak is the only podiatrist located in Marshall County who is on staff at a hospital.** If you need IV sedation or anesthesiologist monitoring why would you have surgery performed in some other doctor's office when you can have your foot surgery performed by a podiatrist who is on staff at a hospital and surgical center. The Guntersville office has a surgical suite for those that op for in-office surgery. Most insurance is accepted and payments can be made by Visa and Master Card as well as payment plans are available. Thank you for visiting our website!

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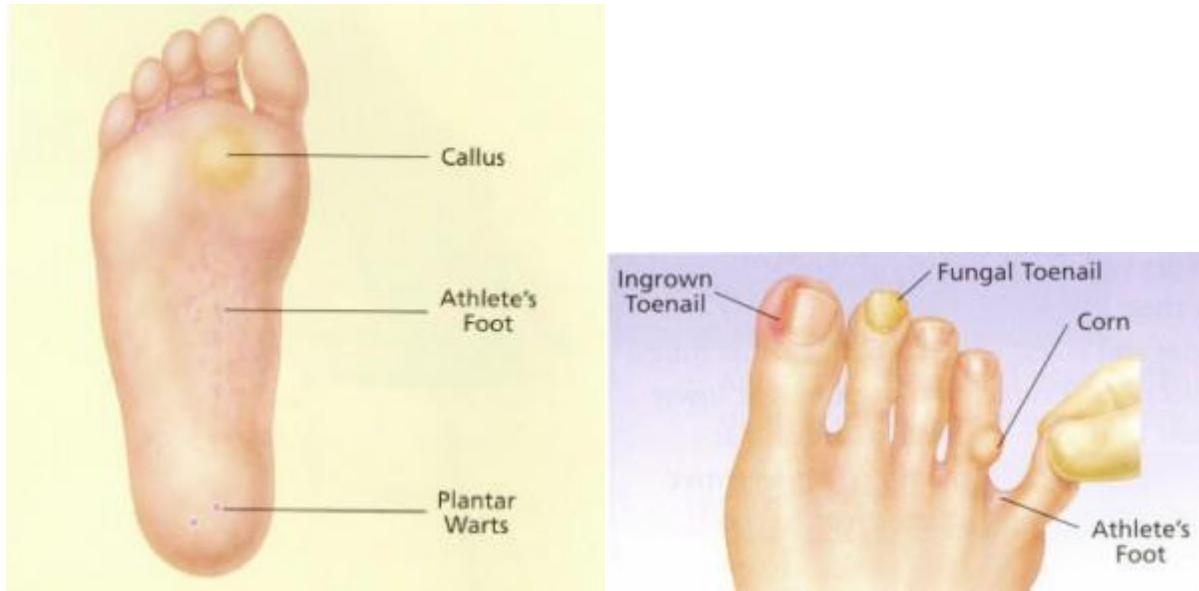
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Skin and Nail Disorders



Athlete's Foot

Athlete's foot is a common fungal infection of the feet, usually occurring between the toes.

What causes athlete's foot?

It is caused by a fungus that becomes active when exposed to a warm and humid environment or when there is a change in the condition of the skin. Athlete's foot is not found just in locker rooms. Any moist environment will harbor fungi. Shoes and socks provide a good breeding ground because they tend to accumulate perspiration and moisture.

How do I know I have athlete's foot?

Symptoms include skin pain, burning and itching, cracking and scaling, and swelling.

Can I get athlete's foot if I'm not an athlete?

Anyone can get athlete's foot. Some people are more prone to fungal infections because of their age, heredity or health condition. Older people are more susceptible because, as their skin ages, it becomes thinner and drier and is less able to guard against fungal infections. People with diseases that lower their resistance to infection are also at increased risk and should take preventive measures to keep athlete's foot in check.

Fungal Nail Infections

Warts

Warts are skin growths. They can appear anywhere on your feet, but most commonly grow on the soles (planter warts). Most warts are harmless and benign (non-cancerous), although they

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can be painful. If untreated, warts can grow to an inch or more in diameter and cover the entire sole of the foot.

What causes warts?

Warts are caused by a virus. Like all viruses, they are contagious and can be spread from one person to another, or from one part of the body to another. Children and teenagers tend to get warts more often than adults. Some people are immune and will never develop warts.

What do warts look like?

Planter warts are hard and flat, with a rough surface and well-defined boundaries. Most are gray or brown with black pinpoint in the center.

How can I treat a wart?

Warts sometimes may spontaneously disappear and later reappear in the same location. Treatment may include over-the-counter medications or a simple surgical procedure. If left untreated, warts can grow to an inch or more in diameter and can spread into clusters of several warts.

Ingrown Toenails

Ingrown toenails occur when a nail curves down at the sides and grows into the skin. This can be painful and invite infection. Ingrown toenails happen most often to the big toe. Symptoms: Redness, swelling and infection make the toe very painful.

What causes ingrown toenails?

Ingrown toenails are often caused by improper trimming. They can also be caused by crowding of toes or pressure in shoes, repeated trauma to the feet from normal activities, or heredity.

How can I prevent ingrown toenails?

It's most important to trim nails carefully with clean, sharp toenail clippers. Avoid injuring the adjacent skin.

How can I treat an ingrown toenail?

Don't attempt to remove any part of an infected nail and don't use over-the-counter medications. Contact Dr. Skaziak, if nail continues to grow inward despite proper trimming.

Nail Surgery

Blood (Hematoma) Beneath the Nail

A very common result of active lifestyles is blood, or a hematoma, beneath the toenail. Hematomas are especially common among people who jog or play tennis, caused by the toes repeatedly rubbing against the shoe. A hematoma might indicate a fractured bone, especially [\(back to top\)](#)

after an injury (such as dropping a heavy object on the end of the toe). The toe should be examined, and maybe x-rayed, to determine the most appropriate treatment.

Some treatment options include: drilling a tiny hole into the nail plate to release the blood and relieve the pain; the nail plate may be removed, so that the nail bed can be cleaned (sometimes this is preferred, because the blood can attract fungi and lead to infection). Nail plates that have been removed will grow again within three to six months.

Nail Fungus



A fungal nail infection is more than just an embarrassing cosmetic problem – it may also cause health problems. Over time, the fungal infection may spread and damage your entire nail. Having damaged fingernails can reduce the sensitivity in your fingertips, making it harder to pick up small objects, such as coins, or to use the computer. Damaged, thick toenails can cause pain while wearing shoes and especially while standing, walking, working, or playing sports.

Left untreated, fungal nail infections may:

- spread to other nails
- spread to and infect others (especially family members) via showers, tubs, even towels

In rare circumstances, fungal nail infection may:

- cause abscesses
- potentially lead to other fungal and bacterial infections
- play a role in worsening foot ulcers in people with diabetes
- cause pain while wearing shoes, and while walking or standing
- permanently deform the nail

Fungus Lives Deep in the Nail Bed and Nail Plate

The most common type of fungal nail infection invades the nail from under the tip of the nail, cuticle, or the top of the nail. It spreads to the lower layers of the nail, the nail bed, and growth center.

Stop Nail Fungus before It Gets Worse

If you think you have a fungal nail infection, see your doctor as soon as possible. Nail fungus is one infection that may not go away on its own. Starting your treatment as soon as you can may help you avoid serious damage to your nail and other health problems.

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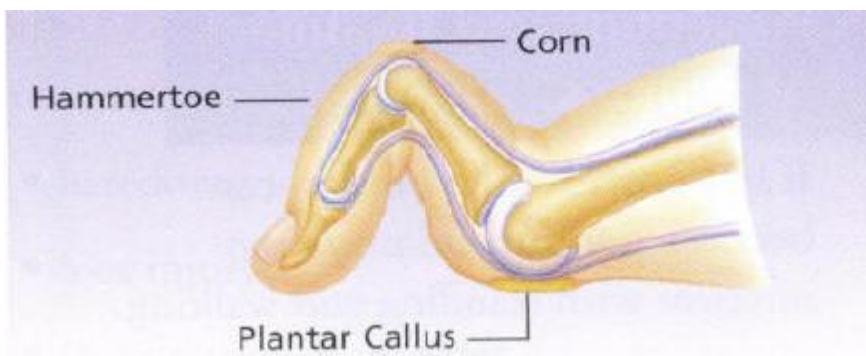
Hammertoes

A hammertoe is an arched toe, the result of an abnormal contraction or “buckling” that leaves the toe in a claw-like position. Once stiffened into position, hammertoes rub against shoes and cause painful corns and calluses.

What causes hammertoes?

A hammertoe usually stems from muscle imbalance, but it is often aggravated by poor-fitting shoes or socks that cramp the toes. Often, a foot with a bunion will also have a hammertoe, caused by the bunion pushing the big toe under a second toe that then becomes arched.

Those with rheumatoid arthritis, high arches, or a tendency to rotate their feet inward when walking are especially susceptible to hammertoes.



Corns and Calluses

A corn is hard, thickened skin that can occur on the top, between or on the tip of the toes. A callus is similar, but is larger and usually occurs across the ball of the foot, on the heel, or on the outer side of the big toe. “Soft” corns are corns that absorb and hold moisture. They’re usually found between the smaller toes.

What causes corns and calluses?

Corns and calluses are your skin’s way of protecting you. Hard layers of dead cells are produced when skin undergoes excessive pressure or friction. For example, where one toe rubs against the other a corn often forms. The thicker the corn or callus becomes, the more pain and burning it may cause as it increases pressure on living tissue underneath.

Diabetic Foot Care

How does diabetes affect my feet?

Many people with diabetes have mild to severe nerve damage. This can cause diminished feeling in the feet. As a result, you may not feel cuts, scratches and breaks in the skin. These wounds can lead to unnoticed infection.

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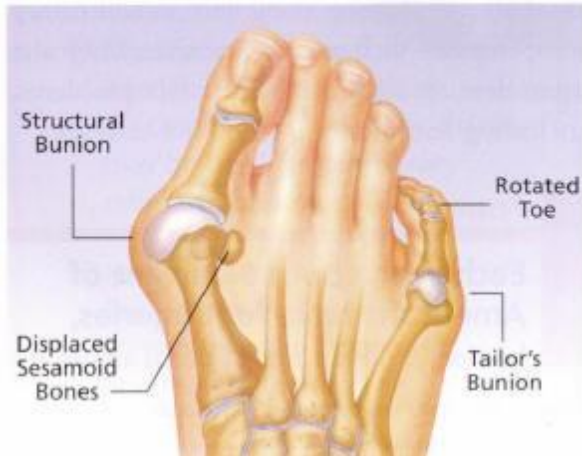
For example, if you have diabetes, you may not notice rough seams in shoes or socks that rub against your skin and result in sores. You may also not be aware of weakening joints, which can cause you to change the way you put pressure on your feet as you walk. Friction you can't feel may cause your skin to blister and crack, opening a path for infection.

Your blood nourishes tissues and carries infection-fighting cells to those tissues that need them. Because diabetes can cause circulation problems, your feet may suffer from a reduced blood supply, putting you at greater risk for infection.

What does “diabetic foot” mean?

You may have heard this term, which refers to the complete cycle of foot irritation, skin breakdown, ulceration, necrosis (dead skin) and bone infection that can lead to limb loss and/or the spread of infection to other parts of the body. With proper foot care, this cycle of events can be prevented or minimized.

Bunions



A bunion is an enlarged bone on the side of the big toe that is angled outward. Depending on the severity of the bunion, the big toe may be angled mildly or sharply toward the other toes.

What causes bunions?

Bunions can be caused by:

- hereditary tendency
- foot injury
- neuromuscular disorder
- congenital deformity (a deformity that is present at birth)
- loose joint movement
- poorly fitting shoes

How do bunions develop?

Most bunions form as the big toe responds to abnormal pressure on foot joints. For example, your foot may roll excessively inward during walking. Over time, this stress may cause the big toe to move toward the other toes. This, in turn, pushes the big toe joint outward.

Bunions may develop along with inflammatory joint diseases such as osteoarthritis. They also often develop along with other foot problems, including hammertoes, corns, and calluses.

Neuromas

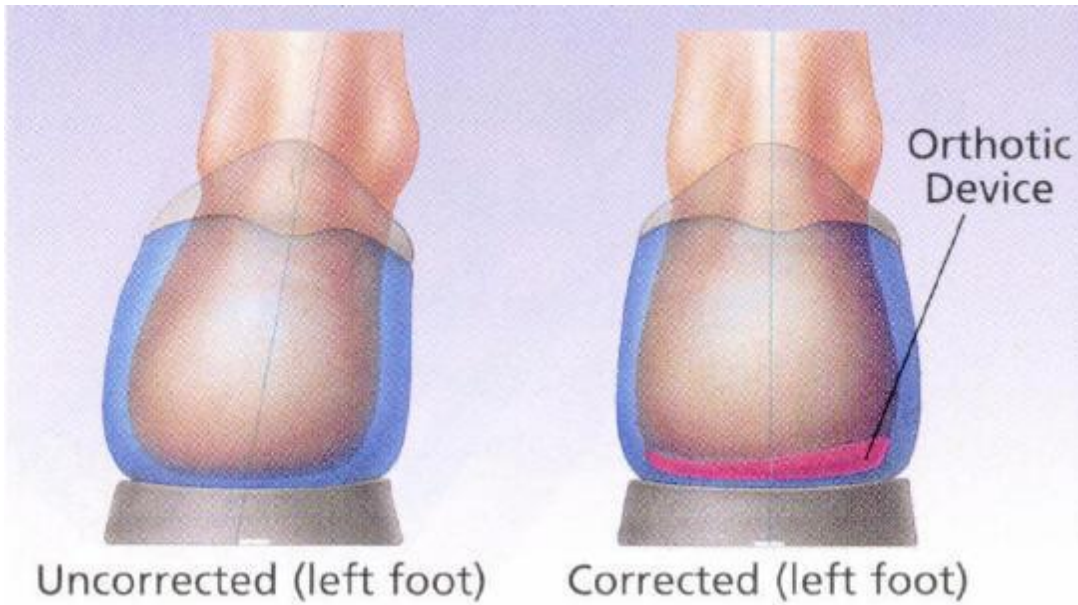


A neuroma is a benign growth that occurs when the nerves in the foot are pinched and inflamed. It is most commonly found between the third and fourth toes. Symptoms include pain, burning, tingling or numbness between the toes and in the ball of the foot.

What causes a neuroma?

Abnormal bone structure, foot injury or tight shoes can cause a neuroma. Women who wear high heels are especially susceptible.

Orthotics



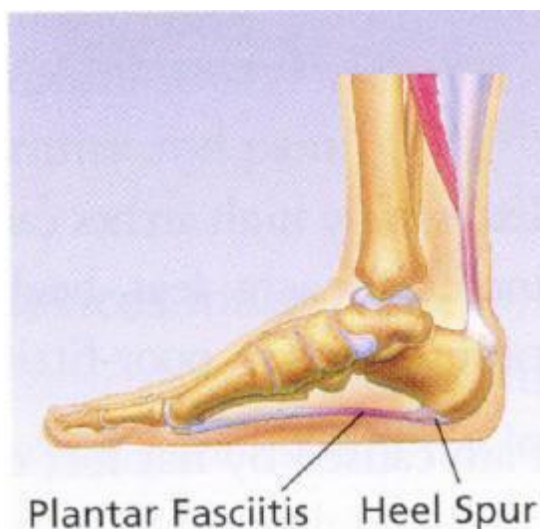
What are orthotic devices?

These are custom-made shoe inserts that are intended to adjust an abnormal or irregular walking pattern by altering the angles at which the foot strikes the ground. They help your feet function better and also minimize stress forces that could cause foot deformity and pain.

How are orthotic devices made?

Orthotic devices are constructed from a mold of your foot. Rigid orthoses are usually made of a firm material like plastic and are primarily designed to control function. Soft orthoses are constructed of flexible materials that help absorb shock, improve balance and take pressure off tender spots.

Heel Pain/Spur



Why do my heels hurt?

The most common cause of heel pain comes from moving your foot incorrectly while walking or running. This can be placing too much stress on the heel bone and the soft tissue around it. The result is pain.

What causes incorrect foot movement?

The way you move your foot can be affected by:

- inherited muscle and bone problems
- heel injury or bruising
- poorly fitted or worn-out shoes
- excessive weight

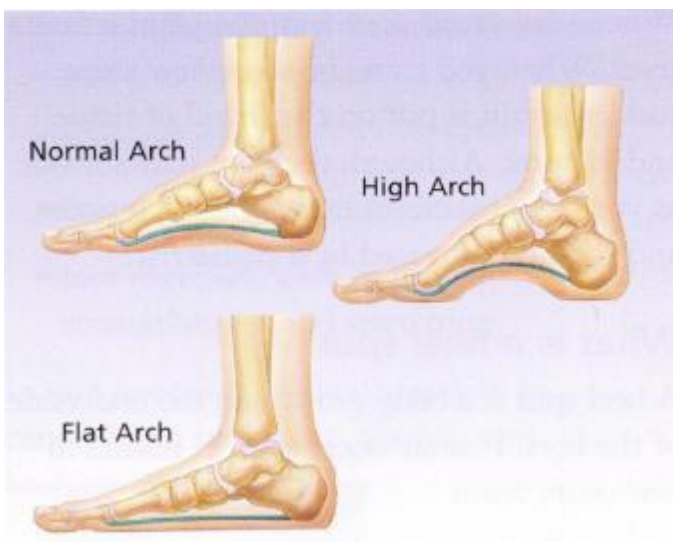
Why do my feet hurt when I get out of bed or stand up?

You may have a plantar fasciitis, a common cause of heel pain. This is an inflammation of the plantar fascia, the band of connective tissue that runs from the heel to the ball of the foot and supports the arch of the foot. Excessive walking, running, or jumping flattens and lengthens the plantar fascia. Eventually, the stress can cause small tears in the plantar fascia. When you are off your feet, the plantar fascia rests. When you stand or take a few steps, a sudden strain is put on that and of tissue and it hurts. Although the pain may subside as you walk, plantar fasciitis can be serious.

What is a heel spur?

A heel spur is a bony growth on the underside of the heel. Plantar fasciitis often results in heel spurs. Some heel spurs are painless. Others can cause chronic pain. If necessary, medical treatment can be recommended to reduce the pain.

Arch Pain



What's the connection between arches and foot pain?

If you have flat feet -feet with low arches- walking can cause painful pressure. Even flat feet that don't hurt can be the cause of future problems, such as bunions, hammertoes, heel and arch pain, pain and fatigue in your feet and legs, and even pain in your lower back. Excessively high arches can also cause problems, including achy feet, heel and arch pain, and calluses due to poor-fitting shoes.

Pain caused by flat feet or high arches can often be relieved by the use of orthotic devices.

Arthritis and Arthritic Foot Care

What is arthritis?

Arthritis is the inflammation and swelling of the cartilage and lining of the joints, generally accompanied by an accumulation of fluid in the joints.

What causes arthritis?

Arthritis is believed to be hereditary, but it has also been associated with many different illnesses. Arthritis can be induced by:

- joint injuries (especially if they aren't treated promptly)
- bacterial and viral infections of the joint
- certain drugs
- bowel diseases such as ulcerative colitis and ileitis

Is arthritis in my feet serious?

If your feet hurt, you may start to walk differently, favoring certain joints. This can lead to knee and back problems, which also can be aggravated by arthritis. If foot pain is not relieved, you may avoid standing and walking. As a result, body muscles may weaken – just when you need the strength to support arthritic joints.

Can arthritis be cured?

While most forms of arthritis can't be cured, they can be controlled. Treatment depends on the type and severity of the condition. Relieving the pain, controlling the inflammation and preserving or restoring joint functions are the goals of any treatment program. A wide variety of drugs can treat arthritis. You also may be recommended to try physical therapy, exercise and/or the use of shoe inserts.



Normal Metatarsal Phalangeal Joint



Moderate Joint Degeneration



Mild Joint Degeneration



Severe Joint Degeneration

Common types of arthritis:

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis. Osteoarthritis afflicts virtually everyone, to some degree, after age 60. It is often called degenerative arthritis or “joint wear and tear” because it breaks down cartilage and bone. Any condition that puts stress on the joints – obesity, repetitive joint motion and injury - may trigger osteoarthritis. Symptoms include:

- pain and stiffness
- dull, throbbing pain (at night)
- muscle weakness

Rheumatoid arthritis is a complex system of diseases with many symptoms that can affect the entire body. In its most serious form, it causes painful, badly damaged joints. In rheumatoid arthritis, the immune system turns against the body, instead of protecting it. It usually comes on abruptly. It frequently affects joints in a symmetrical pattern (for example, it may affect the same joints in both feet). Often symptoms will appear and disappear. Women are much more likely than men to develop rheumatoid arthritis. Symptoms include:

- joint inflammation
- swelling
- difficulty moving
- pain

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Additional symptoms may include fatigue, morning stiffness, weight loss or slight fever.

Gout (or gouty arthritis) is caused by a build-up of uric acid crystals in the joints. Uric acid is a waste product that is usually dissolved in the blood and then passed through the kidneys. If you have gout, the uric acid changes into crystals that form deposits in joints and other tissues. Gout usually affects the big toe, knees and wrists. Men are more likely than women to get gout. The use of diuretics can cause gout or make it worse. Eating red meat and rich sauces or drinking alcohol also may be related to gout. Symptoms include:

- severe pain
- swelling in the joints

What can I do to ease my arthritis?

Living comfortably with arthritis involves a balance between activity and rest. Some types of arthritis require activity to alleviate stiffness and pain. Others require rest.

Should I stop exercising?

Arthritis doesn't have to slow you down. If you enjoy fitness activities or sports, choose a new sport that's easy on your feet (such as swimming) or participate in an old sport at a reduced activity level. Keep moving and stick to the arthritis treatment plan you were advised to do. It's your best bet for living comfortably and taking arthritis in stride.

Exercise-related Injuries



What causes the pain in my heel when I run?

You could be suffering from Achilles tendinitis. This is an inflammation of the tissue surrounding the Achilles tendon. Running on hills or wearing shoes with rigid soles may cause the stress that leads to Achilles tendinitis.

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Why does the top of my foot hurt?

A hairline crack in the bone can result from repeated pounding. You may not even realize its happening. In fact, you may need an x-ray or bone scan to diagnose a stress fracture. Unfortunately, stress fractures can be slow to heal and can worsen if not treated promptly.

What should I do if I injure my foot?

If you sustain a foot or ankle injury, you should seek immediate treatment. However, you can take several steps to treat the injury until you can receive medical attention.

- Gently place a plastic bag of ice on the injured area for 20 minutes each hour.
- Lightly wrap an elastic bandage around the area, taking care not to pull it too tight.
- Elevate your foot so that it is higher than your waist.
- For bleeding cuts, cleanse well, apply pressure with gauze or a towel and cover with a clean dressing.

Bunion Surgery

Positional Bunionectomy

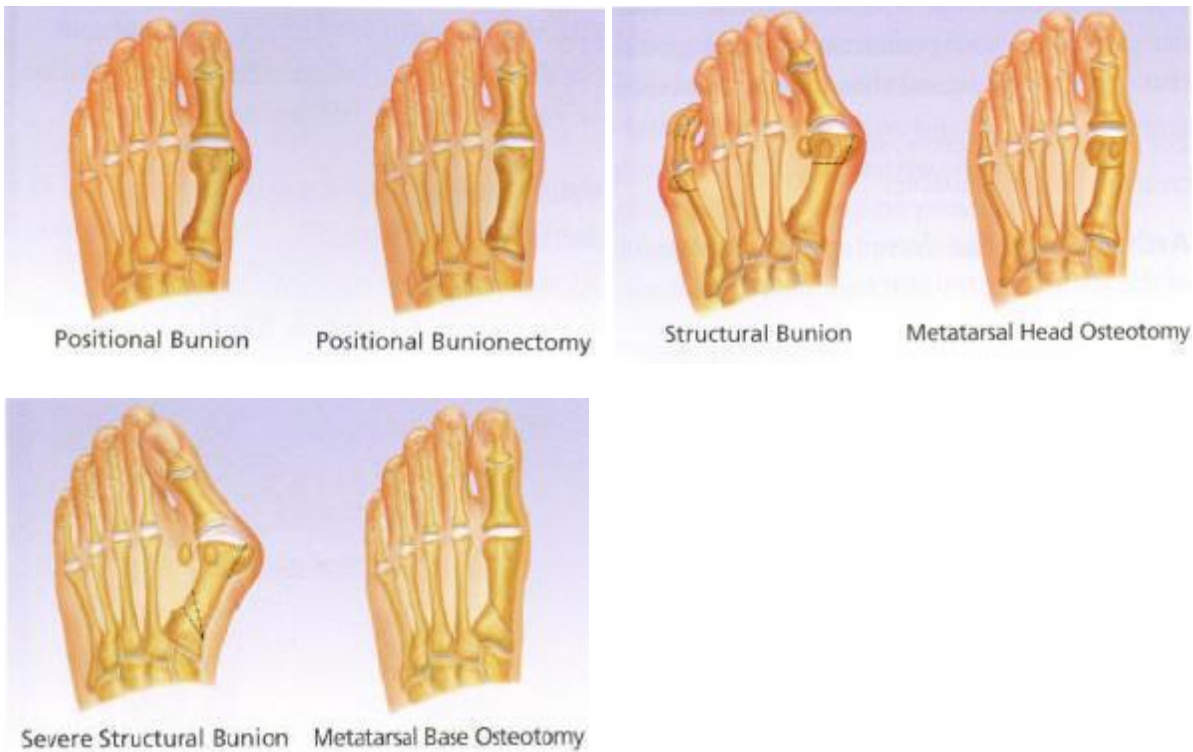
A positional bunion is a bony growth on the base of the big toe. It enlarges the joint. In a positional bunionectomy, the bump is removed and some soft tissue that has tightened may be released. Afterwards, you might have to wear a special surgical shoe or a splint.

Metatarsal Head Osteotomy

Structural bunions occur when the angle between the first and second toe bones increases beyond normal. Sometimes bony growths may form, resulting in irritation and swelling. In a metatarsal head osteotomy, the bone is cut and repositioned. Any bumps are also remolded. Afterwards, you may have to wear a surgical shoe or cast until the bone heals.

Metatarsal Base Osteotomy

Severe structural bunions result when the angle between the first and second toe bones is excessive. To treat these, a metatarsal base osteotomy may be conducted. A wedge of bone is removed from the base of the first metatarsal (large toe) bone and the bone is repositioned. Wires or screws may be inserted to stabilize the bone. Afterwards, you may have your foot in a cast.



Hammertoe Surgery

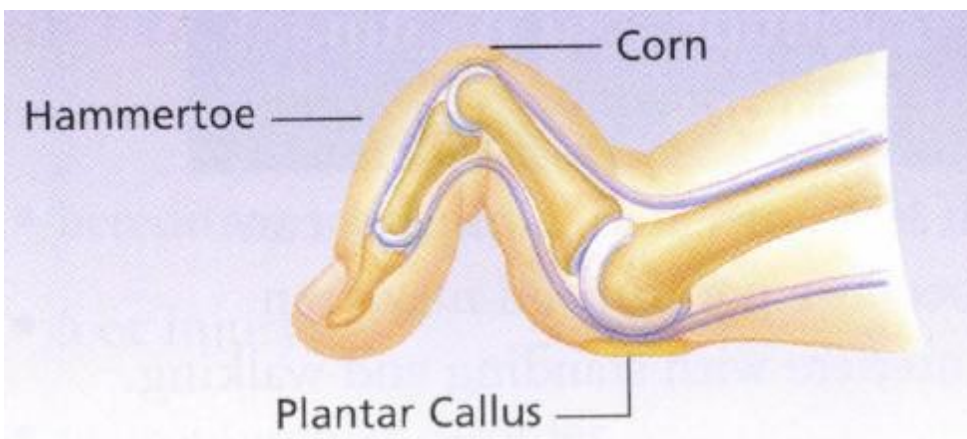
In treating a flexible hammertoe, the tendons are repositioned to allow the toe to lie flat. Afterwards, you may wear a surgical shoe for several weeks.

For rigid hammertoe, several types of treatments are available:

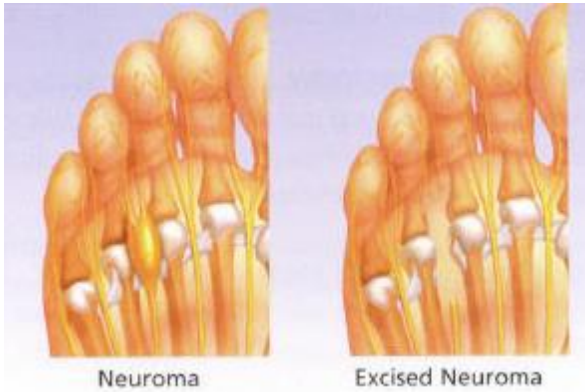
Arthroplasty - A portion of the joint is removed and the toe is straightened.

Fusion - Cartilage between the two toe bones is removed and the bones fuse to form one longer bone.

Implant - In some situations, a portion of the bone is removed and replaced with an implant.



Neuroma Surgery

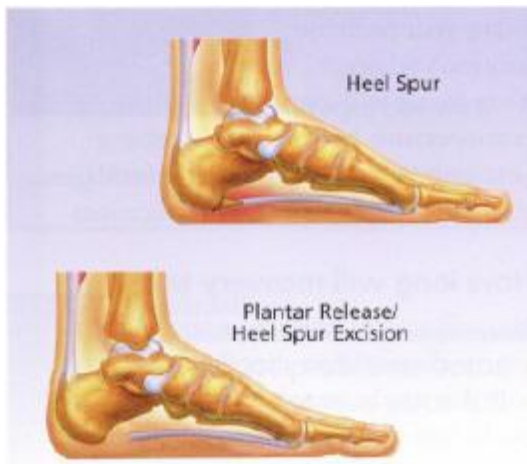


When the nerves are compressed between two toe bones, the nerve becomes enlarged. A benign growth, called a neuroma, results. When a neuroma is removed, or “excised,” a small portion of the nerve is cut out. Often a small area is left without feeling, but this is usually preferable to pain.

Surgery for heel spurs

A heel spur is a bony growth on the underside of the heel bone. Some heel spurs are painless. Others cause chronic pain. A heel spur often accompanies inflammation of the plantar fascia – the band of connective tissue that runs from the heel to the ball of the foot.

Treatment options for heel spurs may include removal of the spur, releasing the plantar fascia or additional noninvasive treatments. Afterwards, your foot may be in a cast and crutches may be necessary.



Surgery for bone spurs

A bone spur is an overgrowth of bone that can cause pain and reduced motion. It can occur on the side of a bone, the top of a bone, or underneath the nail.

Minimal incision surgery involves making a small incision and smoothing the bone. A stitch may be required to hold the incision closed while it heals.

Arthritic Surgery



Arthritis is a condition characterized by inflammation and swelling of the joint lining and degeneration of the cartilage. Fluid usually accumulates in the joints. Arthritis can affect the big toe joint, causing pain and reduced motion. A bunion-like protrusion also may be present. There are a variety of surgical procedures to treat this condition. They include:

Keller Bunionectomy - In this surgery, the base of the bone is removed and fibrous tissue fills in the space. You may have to wear a splint or special shoe for several weeks.

Arthroplasty with joint implantation - In some cases, the joint can be repaired. With severe joint degeneration; a procedure called arthroplasty with joint implantation is required. The joint is removed and replaced with either a one-piece or two-piece implant.

Ingrown toenail Surgery



A nail is ingrown when it curves down at the sides and grows into the skin. With a partial surgical matricectomy, a section of the toenail and the underlying nail matrix (cells that make the nail) are removed. This can be done through surgical excision, chemical or laser destruction.

Surgical Treatments for Nail Disorders

If the problem is severe or chronic, surgery to remove all or a portion of the nail may be recommended. Most surgeries are performed very comfortably under local anesthesia, and require less than one hour to perform.

Partial Nail Removal - For some cases of ingrown nails, only the portion of nail that is growing into the skin is removed. If both sides of the nail are ingrown, they may be removed during one procedure. After the affected portion of the nail is taken, the nail bed is removed along with any enlarged tissue adjacent to the nail plate. The nail root and matrix are then destroyed by phenol, surgical removal. Finally, the skin may be remodeled around the nail.

Permanent Nail Removal - Complete removal of the nail plate is a common remedy for fungal infections and ingrown nails. During this procedure, the nail plate is removed and the nail matrix is destroyed by one of two methods:

- Phenol - An acidic chemical called phenol is applied only to the nail matrix. This destroys the growth cells of the nail
- Surgical removal - The nail matrix and bed is cut away. Stitches are usually necessary.