



Corns and Calluses

What's the problem?

A corn is an area of hard, thickened skin that can occur on the top, between, or on the tip of the toes. A callus is similar in nature, but is larger and usually occurs across the ball of the foot, on the heel, or on the outer side of the great toe.

How Does it feel?

Calluses and corns quite often are due to pressure and bursal sacs (fluid-filled balloons that act as shock absorbers) beneath them, causing symptoms ranging from sharp, shooting pain to dull, aching soreness.

How did this happen?

Corns and calluses form because of repeated friction and pressure, as a shoe (or ground) rubbing against a bony prominence (bone spur) on the toe or foot. In order to prevent the formation of an open sore or a blister, the skin thickens in response to this pressure. Small amounts of friction or pressure over long periods of time cause a corn or callus. Large amounts of friction or pressure over shorter periods of time cause blisters or open sores.

How is it diagnosed?

First, your doctor will conduct a thorough inspection of these areas. She may gently trim some of the thickened skin away, in order to rule out a wart. Your doctor may also order some X-rays to identify the specific bone problem that is causing the corn or callus.

How can I care for myself?

Do not try to treat yourself if you are diabetic or have poor circulation. If you cut yourself, you may cause an infection. Corn pads and callus removers often have harsh acids that peel this excess skin away after repeated application, but they can cause a severe chemical burn, which might lead to infection and greater pain.

You can begin by washing your feet in warm soapy water and gently rubbing away any dead skin that loosens. You can use a pumice stone, buff bar or emery board to "file" this thickened skin, but do this gradually, ideally after each shower or bath. Apply a good moisturizer such as Vitamin E oil, cocoa butter or lanolin to the hardened areas to keep them softer and relieve pain. You can use non-medicated corn pads or moleskin (a thin fuzzy sheet of fabric with an adhesive back) to protect corns and calluses, but make sure you remove them carefully, so you do not tear the skin. Do not wear non-medicated corn pads or moleskin for more a day at a time.

How will my doctor care for me?

Your doctor is the expert in trimming down these areas of thick skin and will often apply comfortable padding to these painful corns and calluses. Special padding devices and materials may be available only from your doctor for your use at home. Other treatments and recommendations from your doctor include:

- Treating the underlying injury with medication for reducing inflammation.
- A cortisone injection into the underlying bursal sac to rapidly reduce pain and swelling.
- Changes in shoe wear.
- Prescription for a custom-made device called an orthotic. This is a device you will wear inside your shoes in order to redistribute pressure more evenly across the ball of your foot.
- Placing a metatarsal pad inside your shoe. The pad may help reduce your contracted hammer toes and relieve pressure on the ball of the foot as well.

Often corns and calluses will have to be trimmed on a regular basis to prevent them from hurting.

How can I prevent it from happening again?

Often changing your style or size of shoes may help. Carefully review the shoes in your closet. Check their fit and discard any that have seams and stitching over painful corns or have worn out innersoles that offer too little protection for calluses on the ball and heel of your foot.

Make sure shoes are wide enough for your feet and have enough depth in the toe area to allow minimal pressure on the toes. To demonstrate whether your shoes are of adequate size and shape, place your foot on a blank sheet of paper and trace the shape of your foot. Then, place the shoe in question on top of your foot tracing. You may be surprised, as are many people, that your shoes are actually smaller and narrower than your feet. Try to imagine the forces present in that shoe when you squeeze your foot into it and then walk at any speed. Ouch!

Review the socks in your drawer. If they have thick seams at the toes or holes, it's time to go shopping. Try to choose natural materials such as cotton and wool. Several types of socks (such as Thor-lo brand) have a double thickness in the toes and heels to protect these areas. Nylon hose with a woven cotton sole on the bottom of the foot to offer less friction and more padding.

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