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What's the problem?

Hammertoe is a term for a toe that curls or is crooked. Hammertoes are a very common foot deformity, or difference from the foot's normal shape. For most people, hammertoes are not painful and don't cause problems.

For some people, the hammertoe deformity gets worse over time. This may cause pain from the extra pressure on the tip of the toe, or the toe rubbing uncomfortably against your shoe. Some people develop a **callus** on their toe, which is an area of hard, thickened skin that your body forms in response to pressure. Your doctor may need to regularly trim your callus to help with pain.

Some people have so much extra pressure on their hammertoe that they develop wounds or **ulcers** (open sores) on the toe. These wounds and ulcers can

easily become infected. If you develop a wound or ulcer on your hammertoe, contact your doctor immediately.

How did this happen?

Hammertoes are a very common foot deformity caused by genetics and biomechanics. **Biomechanics** is a term we use to describe how your foot's muscles, joints, bones, and other structures move and work together. Over time, the biomechanics of your foot can increase the deformity of the hammertoe.

How is it diagnosed?

Hammertoes are diagnosed by a simple exam of your feet. Your doctor may order an x-ray to look closer at the severity and type of deformity. You might also need other lab tests to check for infection or other medical conditions that can affect hammertoes.

How can I take care of myself?

The most important thing you can do is to buy well-fitting, comfortable shoes that don't rub or put pressure on your hammertoe.

- Wearing shoes with soft fabric, or fabric that stretches over the hammertoe, can reduce irritation and pain.
- Avoid high-heel shoes or shoes tight at the toes. High-heel shoes can force your toes into a bent position which makes the hammertoe worse.
- Look at your feet every day to make sure your shoes are not irritating the hammertoe or causing a wound or ulcer.

How will my doctor care for me?

Treatments and recommendations from your doctor may include:

- Trimming and padding calluses on your hammertoe

- Showing you how to use padding to reduce toe pain
- Ordering custom-made foot devices (**orthotics**) or arch supports
- Prescribing antibiotics, if you have an infection

If these treatments do not help with your pain, your doctor may suggest surgery.

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