

# Hammertoes

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## What are they, causes, symptoms and treatment

### What Are Hammertoes?

Hammertoes are a common foot deformity that can cause discomfort and affect mobility. This condition often develops over time and can worsen if left untreated. Understanding the causes, symptoms, and treatment options for hammertoes is essential for managing the condition effectively. This article provides a comprehensive overview of hammertoes, including the different types of surgeries available for severe cases.



A hammertoe is a deformity that causes one or more toes to bend or curl downward instead of pointing forward. This condition most commonly affects the second, third, or fourth toe. The abnormal bending occurs due to an imbalance in the muscles, tendons, or ligaments that normally keep the toe straight.

Hammertoes can be flexible (movable) or rigid (fixed in place). Flexible hammertoes are less severe and can often be treated non-surgically, while rigid hammertoes may require surgical intervention.

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### Causes of Hammertoes

Hammertoes develop due to a combination of genetic, structural, and lifestyle factors. Common causes include:

1. **Footwear:** Wearing tight, narrow, or high-heeled shoes that force the toes into a cramped position.
2. **Muscle Imbalance:** Weakness or tightness in the muscles, tendons, or ligaments that control toe movement.
3. **Genetics:** A family history of hammertoes or inherited foot structures, such as high arches or long toes.
4. **Arthritis:** Inflammatory conditions like rheumatoid arthritis can contribute to joint deformities.
5. **Trauma:** Injury to the toe or foot can lead to hammertoe development.
6. **Age:** The risk of hammertoes increases with age due to wear and tear on the joints and tendons.
7. **Other Foot Conditions:** Bunions, flat feet, or claw toes can increase the likelihood of hammertoes.



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## Symptoms of Hammertoes

The most noticeable symptom of a hammertoe is the abnormal bending of the toe. Other symptoms include:

- Pain or discomfort in the affected toe, especially when wearing shoes.
- Corns or calluses on the top or tip of the toe due to friction against footwear.
- Redness, swelling, or inflammation around the toe joint.
- Difficulty moving the affected toe.
- In severe cases, open sores or ulcers may develop.



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## Treatment for Hammertoes

Treatment for hammertoes depends on the severity of the deformity and the level of discomfort. Options range from conservative measures to surgical intervention.

### Non-Surgical Treatments

1. **Footwear Modifications:**
  - Wear shoes with a wide, deep toe box to reduce pressure on the toes.
  - Avoid high heels or narrow shoes.
2. **Orthotics:**
  - Custom shoe inserts or pads can help redistribute pressure and correct foot alignment.
3. **Toe Exercises:**
  - Stretching and strengthening exercises can improve flexibility and muscle balance.
4. **Splints or Pads:**
  - Non-medicated pads or splints can help realign the toe and reduce discomfort.
5. **Pain Relief:**
  - Over-the-counter pain relievers like ibuprofen or acetaminophen can help manage pain and inflammation.
6. **Ice Therapy:**
  - Apply ice packs to the affected area to reduce swelling and discomfort.



### Surgical Treatment

If conservative treatments fail to relieve symptoms or the hammertoe becomes rigid and painful, surgery may be recommended. The goal of surgery is to straighten the toe, relieve pain, and restore function.

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## Types of Hammertoe Surgeries

Hammertoe surgery involves various techniques depending on the severity of the deformity. Common types include:

### 1. Tendon Release (Tenotomy):

- A procedure to release or lengthen the tight tendons causing the toe to bend.
- Often used for flexible hammertoes.

### 2. Joint Resection (Arthroplasty):

- Removal of part of the toe joint to allow the toe to straighten.
- Commonly used for rigid hammertoes.

### 3. Fusion (Arthrodesis):

- Removal of the damaged joint surfaces and fusing the bones together with pins, screws, or plates.
- Provides permanent correction for severe hammertoes.

### 4. Bone Cutting (Osteotomy):

- Cutting and realigning the bones to correct the deformity.
- Often used in conjunction with other procedures.

### 5. Implant Arthroplasty:

- Replacement of the damaged joint with an artificial implant.
- Used to preserve joint mobility in some cases.



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## Recovery After Hammertoe Surgery



Recovery time varies depending on the type of surgery performed. Generally, patients can expect:

- **Initial Healing:** 2–6 weeks for the bones and tissues to heal.
- **Full Recovery:** Up to 6 months for complete recovery and return to normal activities.
- Post-surgery care may include wearing a protective shoe, keeping the foot elevated, and avoiding high-impact activities.

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## Prevention of Hammertoes

While hammertoes cannot always be prevented, the following measures can reduce the risk:

- Wear properly fitting shoes with adequate toe space.
  - Avoid high heels or shoes with pointed toes.
  - Perform regular foot exercises to strengthen muscles and improve flexibility.
  - Address foot conditions like bunions or flat feet early to prevent complications.
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## When to See a Doctor

Consult a podiatrist or orthopedic specialist if:

- The hammertoe causes persistent pain or interferes with daily activities.
  - You notice signs of infection, such as redness, warmth, or pus.
  - Non-surgical treatments do not provide relief.
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## Conclusion

Hammertoes are a common and often painful foot condition that can significantly impact quality of life. Understanding the causes, symptoms, and treatment options is essential for effective management. While conservative measures can alleviate symptoms, surgical intervention may be necessary for severe cases. With proper care and preventive measures, individuals can reduce the risk of hammertoes and maintain healthy, pain-free feet.