

Common Foot Problems: Corns, Calluses, and Ingrown Toenails

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Corns and Calluses

What's the difference between the two?

Both are a build-up of hard skin over a pressure point. A callus is a broader area of thickening; a corn covers a smaller area (for example, over the top of a joint in a toe) and is raised. These can occur together. For example, people often develop a callus on the bottom of the foot at the place just behind the big toe (where you put your weight when you step). Then a corn can form in the middle of the callus, right under the most prominent part of that bone.



What causes corns and calluses?

They are both caused by excessive pressure and friction, most often from poorly fitting shoes or too much weight on one part of the foot.

How can they be prevented?

Wear properly fitting shoes with good support. Women should avoid high heel shoes, and men need a shoe with room for the toes to move.

What else can I do?

Wearing cushioned pads or insoles may help relieve the pressure. Soaking your feet in lukewarm soapy water and using a pumice stone, or just rubbing vigorously with your hand and a thick moisturizer like Eucerin, can gently remove the thick skin. Never try to cut them out yourself.

When should I call my doctor?

If you have diabetes, your doctor should be looking at your feet at most visits already. If not, ask him to do so. Whether or not you have diabetes, you should call if there is pain, redness, or drainage. These can be signs of an infection or ulcer. Finally, call if pain from a corn persists or is severe.

Ingrown Toenails

Ingrown toenails are a common toenail problem and occur when the nail border grows into the soft tissue of the toe. This can cause pain, swelling and even lead to infection.



What causes ingrown nails?

Improperly trimmed nails contribute: Don't round off the edges—cut straight across. Crowding of the toes by tight shoes can also lead to ingrown toenails, especially if you are on your feet a lot. Standing makes the foot spread out, and there may not be enough room in your shoes. It also turns out that this problem runs in families.

What can I do?

Prevention is best: Clip your toenails properly.

Wear shoes with room to wiggle your toes. If

you do get an ingrown toenail, you need to relieve the pressure from the nail on the toe.

This is done by soaking the foot in water for 15 minutes, then pushing the toe tissue away from the nail with a cotton-tipped swab. You can do this three times a day. Some people recommend putting a piece of cotton or dental floss around the edge of the toenail to relieve the pressure from the nail on the toe.



When should I call my doctor?

Ingrown toenails often require medical care. If there is continued pain, redness, or drainage, the toe may be infected. Podiatrists and many physicians can remove part or all of an ingrown toenail. You should never try to do this yourself.

Tips for Good Foot Care

1. Check your feet daily and look for any redness, cuts or beaks in the skin. Be sure to check between the toes. Ask for help if needed.
2. Wash daily with soap and warm water (not hot water).
3. Cover your feet with a moisturizer or cold cream daily.
4. Start each day with clean socks.
5. Avoid walking barefoot.
6. Wear comfortable, well-fitting shoes.
7. If you have diabetes, take your shoes off when you are waiting in the exam room to see the doctor—don't wait for them to do it, or they may not get to it. It shows you are serious about taking care of your feet!

Some helpful websites:

Australian Podiatry Association: <http://www.podiatry.asn.au/default.asp>. Go to the tab labeled "Foot Health."

There is a privately maintained website that I also like. It seems to support itself by advertising, but it was useful: <http://www.epodiatry.com/index.asp>

