

What Are Hammertoes?

A hammertoe, or claw-toe, is a deformity of your toes, which could affect one, or even several of your smaller toes. Healthy toes are generally straight, but an individual suffering from hammertoes experiences a bending, or curling, of their toes, oftentimes causing the affected toes to look like a claw hammer -- thus the name hammertoes.

Like other foot and ankle related ailments, hammertoes develop over time. Unfortunately, without the proper care, a hammertoe will not go away on its own. This disorder is one that should be treated by a foot-care specialist.

Hammertoe Causes

Because hammertoes can develop due to a number of different reasons, there is not a standalone cause for this disorder. However, several factors can play a role in the development of hammertoes:

1. **Genetics** - if your family has a history of hammertoes, this could increase your risk for developing them yourself.
2. **Weak foot muscles** - if you have sustained an injury to your foot, suffer from certain diseases, such as diabetes or arthritis, have nerve damage, or have had a stroke -- any such weakening of the foot muscles, or damage to the nerves or tendons, will increase your chances of developing hammertoes.
3. **Poor fitting shoes** - High-heeled shoes, or shoes that do not allow the proper space for your toes, can put undue pressure on your toes which may eventually lead to hammertoe.

Hammertoe Symptoms

A few symptoms can indicate the onset of, or even the presence of, hammertoes:

- The presence of a corn on top of one of your small toes -- this corn may be accompanied by pain when wearing tight-fitting shoes
- Pain or difficulty in moving your toes
- Pain in your toes when walking
- Claw-like toes, or a natural bending of your toes in an unnatural way

If your toes have an unnatural curl to them, and especially if they are difficult to move, it is important that you see a podiatrist right away for an examination.

Hammertoe Treatments

Treating hammertoe is oftentimes relatively simple and straightforward. In many cases, hammertoe can be corrected without surgery if the onset of this disorder has been caught in its earlier stages.

Common, non-surgical, hammertoe treatments include:

1. **Change of footwear** - Because improperly fitting footwear is a major contributor to hammertoe, changing footwear to a more comfortable style, or purchasing a pair of orthotic shoes, can help to alleviate some of the pressure put on your toes. In some cases, just changing your footwear may help to correct hammertoe.
2. **Use of inserts** - Customized shoe inserts are sometimes prescribed to help support your toes and correct the onset of hammertoe.
3. **At-home stretching** - Your podiatrist may recommend certain exercises or stretches that you can perform at home that will help to strengthen your foot muscles and to straighten out your toes.
4. **Use of an anti-inflammatory** - An anti-inflammatory, such as ibuprofen, may be recommended help to alleviate inflammation and pain in your affected toes.
5. **Splinting** - Your podiatrist may place a splint on your foot to try to correct the bending of your affected toe or toes.

When To Seek Treatment

If you are experiencing ongoing pain in your toes, we recommend that you set an appointment with our office to see one of our specialists. Our podiatrists specialize in treating hammertoes and their underlying causes, and we will work with you to determine the best route for you to take in your situation. Hammertoe is an affliction that will not go away on its own, and by catching it early, you are saving yourself from not only further discomfort, but also from potentially doing permanent damage to your feet.