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Patient Education

BUNIONS (HALLUX VALGUS)

Causes • Symptoms • Treatment • Surgery



What Are Bunions?

A bunion is a bony prominence that forms at the base of the big toe (hallux valgus) as the toe angles toward the second toe. The joint becomes prominent and may become painful, swollen, and difficult to fit into shoes.

Bunion Severity – Progression Over Time



Causes / Risk Factors

- **Family History** – Inherited foot structure or tendency to develop bunions.
- **Footwear** – Tight, narrow, or high-heeled shoes that squeeze the toes.
- **Repetitive Stress** – Prolonged standing, walking, or certain activities.
- **Arthritis** – Inflammatory conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis.
- **Foot Injury** – Trauma that alters the foot's structure.

Common Symptoms

- Visible bump at the base of the big toe.
- Pain or tenderness at the joint.
- Redness, swelling, or inflammation.
- Corns or calluses from toe rubbing.
- Limited motion of the big toe.
- Difficulty wearing regular shoes.

In severe cases, the big toe may overlap or underlap the second toe, leading to additional discomfort and complications.

Non-Surgical Treatment



- Wear wide, comfortable shoes with a roomy toe box.
- Avoid narrow shoes and high heels.
- **Custom orthotics** or pads to redistribute pressure and support alignment.
- **Pain medication** (e.g., ibuprofen or acetaminophen) if advised by your clinician.
- Ice to reduce swelling and discomfort.
- **Bunion pads** or **splints** for alignment and cushioning.

Surgical Treatment

If **conservative care** fails or the bunion causes severe pain or deformity, surgery may be recommended. The goal is to realign the bones, ligaments, and tendons and remove the bony bump.

- **Osteotomy** – Most common; cuts and realigns the bones (e.g., Austin or Scarf osteotomy).
- **Exostectomy** – Removal of the bony bump on the joint.
- **Arthrodesis** – Fusion of the affected joint, often for severe deformity or arthritis.
- **Lapidus Procedure** – Fusion at the base of the metatarsal, used for instability or hypermobility.
- **Minimally Invasive Surgery** – Smaller incisions with specialized tools, often with faster recovery and less scarring.



Recovery After Surgery

- Bone healing: often 6–8 weeks.
- Full recovery: up to 6 months.
- May include a protective boot, physical therapy, and activity restrictions as **directed** by your surgeon.

Prevention

- Wear roomy, well-fitting shoes.
- Avoid pointed-toe shoes and high heels.
- Use orthotic support when appropriate.
- Keep feet strong and flexible with simple exercises.

See a foot and ankle specialist if you have persistent pain, activity limitations, signs of infection, or if conservative care is not effective.



HOW ORTHOTICS HELP

- **Support proper foot alignment**, which can reduce stress on the bunion joint.
- **Redistribute pressure** across the foot to lessen irritation at the bunion.
- **Improve comfort** in shoes and allow for better daily activity.
- **Help address contributing mechanics**, such as overpronation or arch collapse, that can increase bunion strain.

Custom orthotics do not reverse the bony deformity, and each case should be individually evaluated and fitted by a foot specialist.