

Understanding Bunions



What Causes a Bunion?

A bunion is most often caused by wearing shoes that are too tight across the toes. The side of the shoe pushes the big toe in toward the second toe. This forces the joint at the base of the big toe out to the side. Bunions occur mostly in women, as they are more likely to wear tight shoes. A tendency to get bunions can also run in families. And some diseases, such as arthritis, can cause bunions.



Shoes that are too tight can cause a bunion.

Symptoms

A bunion often causes pain and swelling around the joint at the base of the big toe. The skin may become red or warm. If the big toe pushes under the second toe, a painful corn may form on the top of the second toe. In some cases, bunions cause no symptoms—other than making the foot harder to fit in a shoe.

Inside Your Big Toe

The bone at the base of your big toe connects to a bone in the ball of your foot. Where the bones connect is called a **joint**. Normally, the two bones lie almost in a straight line, and your big toe points straight ahead. But sometimes the big toe starts to turn in toward the smaller toes. This pushes the joint out to the side, causing a bump. This bump is called a **bunion**. It can be mild, moderate, or severe.

A mild or moderate bunion

is a small bump on the side of the foot at the base of the big toe. It forms when the big toe turns in toward the second toe. This pushes the joint at the base of the big toe out to the side.



A severe bunion

is a larger bump on the side of the foot. It forms as the big toe turns in even farther. The big toe often moves under the second toe.



Diagnosis and Treatment

Your doctor can tell if you have a bunion from the look and feel of your big toe. In some cases, you may have x-rays to rule out arthritis. Although a bunion won't go away, wearing shoes that fit properly will often relieve the pain. Padding and icing the bunion may also help. Bunions that remain painful may need surgery.

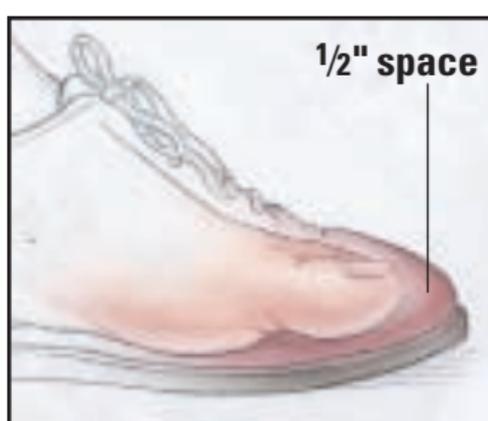
Shoes

To relieve a bunion, you don't have to buy shoes that are ugly or out of fashion. But follow these tips:

- Shop for shoes late in the day. This is when your feet are the largest.
- Have both feet measured often. Fit shoes to your larger foot.
- Look for shoes that have the same shape as your foot but are slightly wider across the toes.
- Choose low-heeled shoes.
- Always try shoes on. Stand up and walk around. If the shoes aren't comfortable, don't buy them.

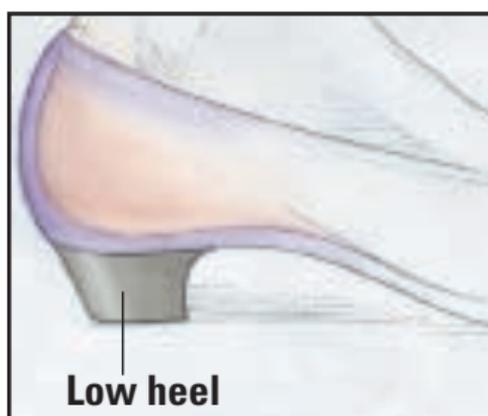
Toes

There should be $\frac{1}{2}$ " between your longest toe and the tip of the shoe. The shoe should be wide enough for you to wiggle your toes.



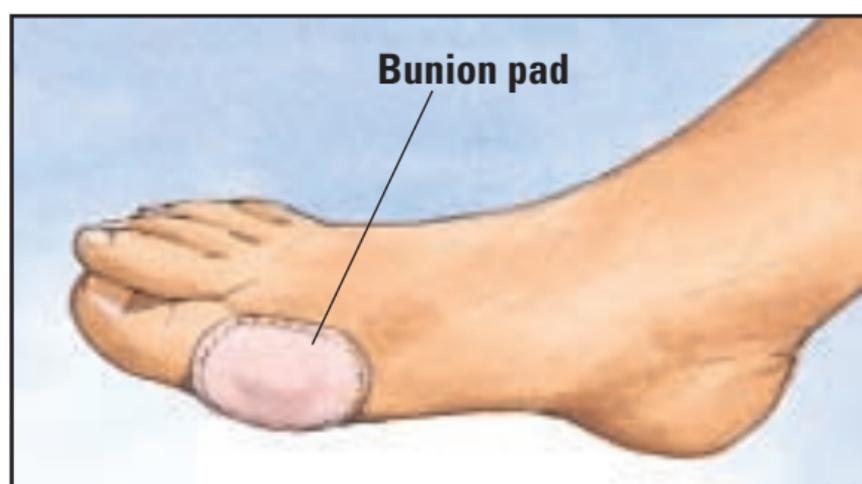
Heels

Heel height should be low. The back of the shoe should grip your heel firmly so the shoe doesn't flop when you walk.



Pads

You may want to put a pad over the bunion to cushion it. You can buy bunion pads at most drugstores.



Ice Massage

To help relieve a painful bunion, put an ice cube in a plastic bag. Rub the ice on the bunion for 5 minutes. Repeat 2 or 3 times a day.



Surgery

Wearing wider shoes and padding the bunion may not relieve the pain. Your doctor may then suggest surgery. During surgery, the bunion is shaved away and the bones are put back in a straight line.

Preventing Future Problems

Your feet tend to get larger as you age. That means you may need to increase your shoe size from time to time. Wearing shoes that are roomy across the toes and that have low heels will help keep a bunion from getting worse or causing pain. When your feet are comfortable, you can do more of the things you enjoy.

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