

Bunions



A bunion is an enlargement of the joint at the base of the big toe - the metatarsophalangeal (MTP) joint - that forms when the bone or tissue at the big toe joint moves out of place. This forces the toe to bend toward the others, causing an often painful lump of bone on the foot. Since this joint carries a lot of the body's weight while walking, bunions can cause extreme pain if left untreated. The MTP joint itself may become stiff and sore, making even the wearing of shoes difficult or impossible.

Symptoms

- Development of a firm bump on the outside edge of the foot, at the base of the big toe.
- Redness, swelling, or pain at or near the MTP joint.
- Corns or other irritations caused by the overlap of the first and second toes.
- Restricted or painful motion of the big toe.

How Do You Get a Bunion?

Bunions form when the normal balance of forces that is exerted on the joints and tendons of the foot becomes disrupted. This can lead to instability in the joint and cause the deformity. They are brought about by years of abnormal motion and pressure over the MTP joint. They are, therefore, a symptom of faulty foot development and are usually caused by the way we walk, and our inherited foot type, our shoes, or other sources.

People who suffer from flat feet or low arches are also prone to developing these problems, as are arthritic patients and those with inflammatory joint disease. Occupations that place undue stress on the feet are also a factor; ballet dancers, for instance, often develop the condition. Wearing shoes that are too tight or cause the toes to be squeezed together is also a common factor, one that explains the high prevalence of the disorder among women.

What Can You Do For Relief?

Apply a commercial, nonmedicated bunion pad around the bony prominence. Wear shoes with a wide and deep toe box. If your bunion becomes inflamed and painful, apply ice packs several times a day to reduce swelling. Avoid high-heeled shoes over two inches tall. See your podiatric physician if pain persists.

Pain Treatment options vary with the type and severity of each bunion, although identifying the deformity early in its development is important in avoiding surgery. Podiatric medical attention should be sought at the first indication of pain or discomfort because, left untreated, bunions tend to get larger and more painful, making nonsurgical treatment less of an option. The primary goal of most early treatment options is to relieve pressure on the bunion and halt the progression of the joint deformity.

At [Capital Foot & Ankle Centers](#), we may recommend these treatments:

- **Padding & Taping** -- Often the first step in a treatment plan, padding the bunion minimizes pain and allows the patient to continue a normal, active life. Taping helps keep the foot in a normal position, thus reducing stress and pain.
- **Medications** -- Anti-inflammatory drugs and cortisone injections are often prescribed to ease the acute pain and inflammations caused by joint deformities.
- **Physical Therapy** -- Often used to provide relief of the inflammation and from bunion pain. Ultrasound therapy is a popular technique for treating bunions and their associated soft tissue involvement.
- **Orthotics** -- Shoe inserts may be useful in controlling foot function and may reduce symptoms and prevent worsening of the deformity.

When early treatments fail or the bunion progresses past the threshold for such options, podiatric surgery may become necessary to relieve pressure and repair the toe joint.

Surgical Options

When conservative treatment does not provide satisfactory relief from symptoms, or when the condition interferes with your activities, surgery may be necessary. Pain and deformity are significantly reduced in the great majority of patients who undergo bunion surgery. The surgery will remove the bony enlargement, restore the normal alignment of the toe joint, and relieve pain. Postoperative orthoses or supportive devices may be recommended to improve foot function.

Surgery may be performed at a hospital, surgical center or properly equipped office operating room. Depending on the procedure, the facility at which it is performed and the patient's medical status, the surgeon may choose a local, spinal or general anesthetic. In many cases, the procedure can be performed under local anesthesia.

At [Capital Foot & Ankle Centers](#), **bunion surgery is our specialty**. If you are experiencing bunion pain, come in and we can discuss your specific problem in detail.