

# Bunions

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A bunion is an enlargement of the joint at the base of the big toe or 1<sup>st</sup> 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 a painful spot. This is a weight bearing joint so bunions can cause extreme pain if left untreated. On the other hand, some people have no pain at all and are able to accommodate the bump with wider shoe gear. The MTP joint itself may become stiff and sore, making shoes uncomfortable. Bunions can also form on the outside of the foot or 5<sup>th</sup> MTP joint along the little toe. This is called a “bunionette” or “tailor’s bunion.”

## Symptoms

- 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.
- Reduced or painful motion of the big toe.

Bunions form when the normal balance of forces exerted on the joints and tendons of the foot becomes unbalanced. This causes instability of the joint and can cause the deformity. They take years to form. They are, therefore, a symptom of faulty foot structure and are caused by the way we walk (which is directly due to our inherited foot type), our shoes, neuromuscular disorders, congenital deformities or acute trauma.

Just because you inherit the probability of having bunions doesn’t mean you have to develop them. Custom orthotics can control the foot and make your foot function closer to normal. Shoes must be fitted properly – tight shoes can cause bunions!

- Wear shoes with a wide and deep toe box and not higher than 1.5”.
- If your bunion becomes inflamed and painful, apply ice packs a few times a day to reduce swelling.
- See your podiatric physician if pain persists.

The first treatment option is to relieve pressure on the bunion and halt the progression of the joint deformity. A podiatric physician may recommend these treatments:

- **Orthotics**  
May reduce symptoms and prevent the problem from becoming worse.
- **Surgical Options**  
Several surgical procedures are available to the podiatric physician. The surgery will remove the bony enlargement, restore the normal alignment of the toe joint, and possibly relieve pain. A simple bunionectomy, in which only the bony prominence is removed, may be used for the less severe deformity. Severe bunions require cutting the bone and realigning the joint. Recuperation takes time, and swelling and some discomfort are common for several weeks following surgery. Pain, however, is easily managed with medications prescribed by your podiatric physician.

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*Connie Lee Bills, D.P.M.*