

Bunions

⦿ What is a bunion?

Bunions are one of the most common forefoot deformities. They occur with a shift in the alignment of one of the bones making up the big toe, causing it to move towards the lesser toes. This shift results in the formation of a bony prominence on the inside of the forefoot. Over time the big toe may come to rest under or over the 2nd toe. This condition can cause a variety of complaints which may result in severe pain.

⦿ Symptoms

Those with bunions often complain of:

- **Swelling/tenderness** of skin overlying the joint
- **Redness** over the affected area
- **Widening** of the forefoot as the bunion worsens
- **Discomfort** when wearing tight shoes
- **“Hammering”** and **corns** on the 2nd toe
- **Corns** and **callouses** where the 1st and 2nd toes rub
- **Stiffness** of the big toe due to **arthritis**. This is called “Hallux Rigidus”.
 - **Bursitis** – the presence of a fluid filled sack over the bunion. This may be painful and become infected.

⦿ Causes

Bunions are most commonly caused by **ill-fitting footwear** and are more common in women due to their tendency to wear narrow, pointy toed shoes. Bunions can also be **hereditary** or can develop with no recognisable cause.

Bunions can also be a by-product of **excess pronation**, or “rolling in” of the feet, because more pressure is applied to the inner border of the foot, pushing the big toe inwards. Other causes include **rheumatoid** or **osteoarthritis**, **foot muscle imbalance**, **leg length difference**, **ligament weakness**, or **injury** to the feet.



⦿ Treatment & prevention

◆ Footwear

Ensure your shoes conform to the shape of your foot and have **sufficient forefoot width** and **depth** to prevent excessive pressure over the bunion. Shoes with stretchy uppers have been very successful in alleviating bunion pain. Try to **avoid high heeled shoes** as the forefoot is forced into the narrower part of the shoe. In severe cases, **rocker soles** can be used to reduce time spent on the ball of the foot when walking.

◆ Bunion Shields

Silicone bunion shields can relieve pain by providing **extra cushioning** between the bunion and the point where it rubs against the shoe. If trying this option, footwear **MUST** be wide enough to accommodate the shield.

◆ Surgery

Surgery should be considered a last resort. Although it will improve the appearance of the foot, it is not meant for cosmetic purposes. Minor surgery may involve **filleting of the bone**, or in severe cases, a complete **reconstruction** of the big toe may be required.

⦿ How do orthotics help with bunions?

If **excess pronation** is the cause of the bunion, custom made orthotics can **slow the progression of the bunion** by redistributing pressures away from this part of the foot. Orthotics will not correct bunions – they will only help to relieve pain whilst preventing or delaying further deterioration.

⦿ Exercises

A number of exercises may be recommended by your orthotist. The aim of these exercises is **NOT** to correct the position of the big toe, but to keep it **flexible and mobile**. This will help to **reduce pain and further progression** of the deformity.

❶ Grasp the big toe with one hand and stretch the joint in all directions. Hold the position at the end range of motion for 10-15 seconds. Repeat.

❷ Find an elastic band and loop it around both big toes. Spread your feet so that the toe is "straightened". Hold for several minutes and repeat.