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# Calluses & Corns

## What are calluses and corns, and what causes them?

Calluses and corns are thick hard areas in the skin that are caused by repeated friction and pressure. Activities such as using a shovel repeatedly can cause calluses on the palms. People who work on their knees, such as people who install flooring get calloused knees. Pressure points on the bottom of the feet and toes can cause calluses and corns that are small callus-like skin thickenings that can be quite painful. Unfortunately the thickening of the skin makes it even more painful, like walking with a pebble in your shoe. This problem can be worsened by poorly fitting shoes and high heels. They are more common as we age and lose a protective layer of fat on our soles, that serves to buffer pressure points. Changes in the foot bone structure as we age (e.g., bunions) also predisposes us to calluses and corns.

## How can I treat calluses and corns?

It is most important to eliminate causes of the pressure points and there are a number of ways to do this.

- 1) Remove the thickened skin.
  - a. Soak your feet in water for about 10 minutes, and (or) apply a softening agent for several days, like **salicylic acid** (e.g., **Dr. Scholl's Corn Pads**) or a **20 to 40% urea moisturizing cream** (available at pharmacies and Amazon.com).
  - b. Then file the area with a pumice stone or hand-held file to remove the thickened dead skin. Stop before you get tenderness or draw blood. Don't file too deep, to avoid an injury that may predispose to bleeding or an infection.
  - c. Every week or two repeat this process to keep the corn or callus flat.
  - d. Then for maintenance keep the affected skin soft by applying a urea containing moisturizer daily.
- 2) Avoid wearing shoes that aggravate the problem, such as shoes that are too tight or high heels.
- 3) Insert gel insole pads in your shoes to better cushion your feet to redistribute weight away from the pressure points. Getting custom made shoe inserts (orthotics) by a podiatrist is a more expensive alternative.
- 4) Foam pads can be inserted between toes to eliminate the pressure that causes corns on the sides of the toes (e.g., **Dr. Scholl's Corn Cushions**).
- 5) If you have a structural abnormality in your toes or feet that is the cause, and the above measures are ineffective, a podiatrist may recommend foot surgery.

Beware of signs of infection such as pain, swelling, redness, or drainage. Call us or see you primary care provider if you suspect an infection.

**If you are a diabetic or have numbness in your feet, you should see a podiatrist, rather than self treating, to avoid injury that may predispose you to a serious foot infection.**

