Corns and calluses

Baby your feet

Those new shoes were a bit tight on your toes, but they looked so good you bought them anyway. You've broken them in since then, but you've also developed a hard, painful lump of skin on your pinky toe. Now it hurts too much to wear the shoes at all.

Maybe that's for the best. What you've probably developed on your toe is a corn. Corns and calluses result from pressure or friction on skin, causing the skin to protect itself by thickening and hardening. Poorly fitting shoes are a common cause of corns and calluses.

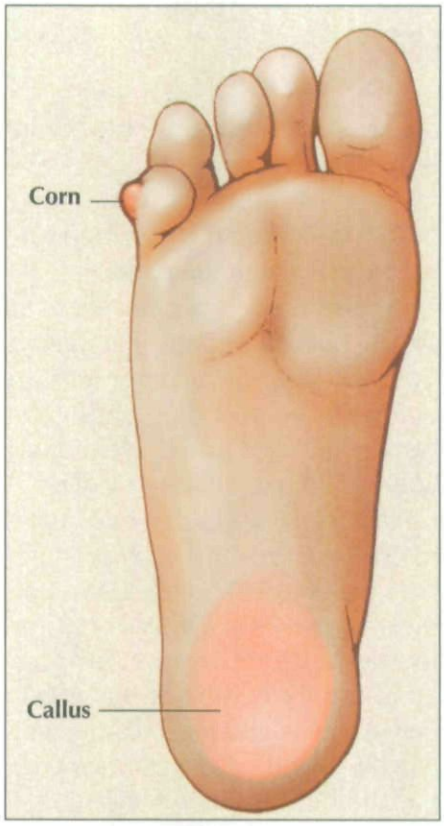
Preventing or treating corns and calluses is usually fairly easy. However, extra care and caution is warranted if you're more at risk of foot sores and their complications because of diabetes or poor circulation. Then, even minor skin injuries can lead to sores that are difficult to heal and can lead to infection.

What's the difference?

Corns and calluses develop in the same way, but the result is different. Calluses usually develop on the heel or bottom of the foot and rarely hurt. They often appear as a thick, rough layer of skin and can be an inch or more in diameter.

Corns are smaller — usually about a quarter-inch to a half-inch in diameter — and have a hard center. They typically develop on the tops and sides of toes. Corns can be painful when pushed and may cause a dull ache.

In addition to being caused by ill-fitting shoes, corns and calluses may also develop if you have some type of a foot deformity, such as a bunion or hammertoe, which causes a bone protrusion from your foot to rub on the inside of your shoe.



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Home care

Although corns and calluses can be unsightly, they generally need treatment only if they cause discomfort. If you're not at increased risk of complications because of diabetes or poor leg circulation, steps you can take on your own to prevent or treat a corn or callus often include:

- *Wearing comfortable shoes* — Corns and calluses can be prevented or will often go away when you eliminate the rubbing and friction that causes them.
- *Wearing nonmedicated corn or callus pads* — These cushion and protect skin from friction, allowing time for corns or calluses to diminish in size.
- *Gradually rubbing it away* — After bathing, gently rub off a layer of thickened skin with a washcloth or pumice stone. Don't remove all of the toughened skin at once. Rubbing away a corn or callus may take a week or longer. Don't try to cut or shave down a corn or callus, as this may lead to an infection.

When to seek care

If you have corns or calluses that are painful or inflamed — or recur or persist despite home care — see your doctor. Your doctor or a foot care specialist may be able to pare down a large corn or callus with a surgical instrument, which typically provides pain relief. ❐

Shoe shopping

The foundation for preventing and treating corns and calluses is properly fitting shoes. Select what's best by:

- *Shopping late* — Feet swell as the day progresses, so shop for shoes in midday or evening.
- *Finding a sufficiently wide, deep toe box* — You should be able to wiggle your toes, but the shoe shouldn't be so big that it slides around when you walk.
- *Buying low heels* — High heels can cramp your foot and put extra pressure on your toes.
- *Watching for seams* — A poorly positioned seam or stitch can cause friction.
- *Fitting it right* — If a shoe isn't comfortable in the store, it's unlikely to be comfortable later. If you feel a pressure point in an otherwise good shoe, ask to have the shoe stretched.
- *Realizing that foot sizes change* — It's possible to move up a size or two over the years.

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