



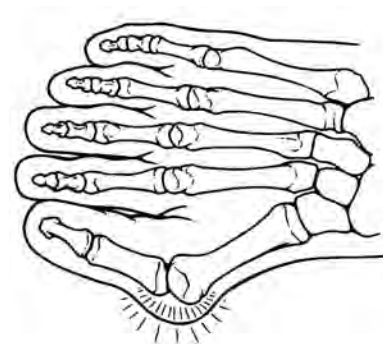
## Bunions and hammertoes

A bunion is a swelling of the joint at the base of the big toe. The big toe may bend toward and overlap the other toes. A hammertoe is a toe that bends up permanently at the middle joint. Both conditions are usually irritated by wearing shoes that are too short or narrow. These problems sometimes run in families.

### Prevention

Proper footwear can help reduce the risk of bunions.

- Wear roomy shoes that give your toes plenty of room to spread out. Make sure that your shoes fit properly.
- Wear shoes with a low or flat heel. Avoid high-heeled shoes, which put more pressure on the big toe (metatarsophalangeal) joint.
- Excessive foot pronation (rolling in or flattening at the arch) has been linked to bunion formation. Orthotics (custom made shoe inserts) that control foot pronation may be helpful in slowing down or preventing the progression of bunion formation. Also, foot orthotics may be helpful in reducing or eliminating the pain associated with bunions. However, foot orthotics should not be expected to reverse or improve the structural malalignment of the bunion or the big toe.



A bunion is a swelling caused by a misshapen joint at the base of the big toe.



A hammertoe is a toe that bends up permanently at the middle joint.

- Avoid activities that put pressure on your big toe and foot. Don't give up exercise because of toe pain. Instead, try activities that don't put a lot of pressure on your foot, such as swimming or bicycling.
- Stretch the parts of your shoes that rub on painful areas. Look for a shoe repair shop that stretches shoes, or ask your medical professional to recommend one.

# Bunions, Hammertoes, and Ingrown Toenails

## Home treatment

Once you have a bunion or hammertoe, there is usually no way to completely get rid of it. Home treatment will help keep it from getting worse.

- Wear low-heeled, roomy shoes that have good arch support.
- Cut out the area over the bunion or hammertoe from an old pair of shoes to wear around the house, or wear comfortable sandals that don't press on the area.
- Cushion the bunion or hammertoe with moleskin or donut-shaped pads to prevent rubbing and irritation.
- Try aspirin, ibuprofen, or acetaminophen to relieve pain. Ice or cold packs may also help.

Surgery, as a last option, may be helpful if home treatment does not relieve pain. There are different types of surgery for bunions and hammertoes. You and your doctor can decide which one is best for you.

## Call Kaiser Permanente if:

- Severe pain in the big toe came on suddenly, and you have not been diagnosed with gout.
- Pain does not respond to home treatment in two to three weeks.
- Severe pain interferes with walking or daily activities.
- The big toe begins to overlap the second toe.
- You have diabetes, poor circulation, or peripheral vascular disease.

Irritated skin over a bunion or hammertoe can easily become infected in people with diabetes or poor circulation.

## Ingrown toenails

Ingrown toenails are caused when an improperly trimmed toenail cuts into the skin at the edge of the nail. Shoes that are too tight can also cause ingrown toenails. Because the cut can easily become infected, prompt care is needed.

## Prevention

- Cut toenails straight across so the edges cannot cut into the skin. Leave the nails a little longer at the corners so that the sharp ends don't cut into the skin.



Cut toenails straight across.

- Wear roomy shoes and keep your feet clean and dry.

## Home treatment

- Soak your foot in warm water.
- Wedge a small piece of wet cotton under the corner of the nail to cushion the nail and keep it from cutting the skin.
- Repeat daily until the nail has grown out and can be trimmed.
- Soaking the feet in warm water for 15 minutes 3 to 4 times a day will help relieve swelling or tenderness while toenails grow out.

## Call Kaiser Permanente if:

- Signs of infection develop
  - increased pain, swelling, redness, or tenderness
  - heat or red streaks extending from the area
  - discharge of pus
  - fever of 100 degrees or higher with no other cause
- You have diabetes or circulatory problems

## Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at [kp.org](http://kp.org) to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.