

Corns, calluses and blisters explained



Daily life can be hard on the feet. With every step pressure is applied to the soles of the feet, which can cause calluses to build up. Shoes rub on the toes and heels resulting in blisters and corns. These seemingly minor skin conditions can be incredibly painful and can stop you in your tracks. People with diabetes and other conditions that lead to loss of sensitivity in the feet are more prone to these skin conditions and are at increased risk of minor skin problems becoming more serious.

Corns: corns usually develop from shoes rubbing and creating pressure against bony areas of the foot — usually the smooth surface of the toes. They can also be caused by friction between toes, and are characterised by small circular sores that are hard and funnel-like in the centre and surrounded by a mound of swollen tissue. Corns can be painful, especially if the friction that created them continues. If left untreated, corns can grow down into the tissue of your feet and cause infections and ulcers.

Calluses: calluses form on areas of the foot that are weight bearing and therefore subject to force as you move around. Characterised by hard, sometimes large, patches of skin, calluses usually occur on the bottom of the feet and are a common consequence of an active lifestyle. Calluses on the soles of the feet are normal, but in other areas can be caused by walking imbalances, skin infections and poorly fitted shoes.

Blisters: blisters are small bubbles of fluid, usually formed by shoes rubbing on the heels or sides of the feet. The fluid is covered by a thin layer of skin to protect the blister from infection and can be painful to touch. Blisters will usually heal within a few days to a week but can easily become infected if not properly looked after.

Treating corns, calluses and blisters

Minor skin conditions such as corns, calluses and blisters can become serious if left untreated as they can lead to infection and other foot problems. Treatment is usually easy to manage at home with some careful foot maintenance and damaged areas tend to heal quickly if properly looked after and rested. Patients with a higher risk of foot injury, including diabetics and anyone with a condition affecting foot sensitivity or circulation problems, should be careful to check for corns, calluses and blisters regularly so they can be treated before they become infected.

Corns: clean the corn with warm, soapy water and gently remove the thickened skin with a pumice stone. Be careful to rub gently and only in one direction. If pus or fluid comes out of the corn, clean the area and cover it in an antiseptic dressing, then book an appointment with us as soon as possible, as this is a sign of infection. Over-the-counter medicated creams and ointments are available to treat corns, but seek professional advice before purchasing as the acidity in some of these treatments can affect — and even burn — healthy skin, with the potential for far more serious infection. Diabetics and people suffering from decreased sensitivity should never use over-the-counter medications for the treatment of corns.

Calluses: calluses can be worn down by gently rubbing a pumice stone over the built up skin. This is best performed during or after a shower when the skin is soft and more easily worn away. For very serious cases, calluses can be surgically removed, and we can advise as to whether surgery will be worthwhile. However, for most patients, we will be able to scrape a layer off the surface of a callus and will be able to offer alternative treatments to help ease the pain and extent of seriously callused feet, including creams to soften the callus and make them easier to remove with a pumice stone. Avoid cutting or tearing at a callus with scissors or other sharp objects, as this can lead to infection.

Blisters: blisters should be cleaned with warm water and a mild soap, treated with antiseptic cream and covered with gauze and a plaster or other medically-approved wound covering to protect the area. Try to wear different shoes to take the pressure off the sore area and remove the plaster at night to allow the blister to breathe so it can dry out. Don't cut or tear at the skin in an attempt to remove the problem area as this can lead to infection and the problem may last longer or become more serious than if it is left to clear in its own time.



Five tips to prevent corns, calluses and blisters

1. Get your feet professionally measured: having your feet professionally measured before buying new shoes is advisable so you're definitely getting the perfect fit for your feet. Properly fitted shoes will mean less rubbing and less discomfort from day one with new shoes. If you suffer from bunions, arthritis or hammertoes, you should make sure that your shoes allow room for these abnormalities to prevent the formation of corns, calluses and blisters on areas that are targets for friction and rubbing.

2. When shopping for shoes, aim to be trying shoes on at the end of the day. Your feet swell the most in the afternoon and that time of day is best for getting a good idea of what shoes will rub and lead to corns, calluses and blisters.

3. Keep shoes in good condition or take advantage of the opportunity to go shopping for new ones! Shoes that are worn in the sole give your feet less protection, as well as less padding to absorb the shock of force when your foot hits the ground. This can lead to callus build up underneath the foot and can become painful. Shoes that are worn in the heel can mean that harder areas of the shoe are exposed once the soft covering has worn away, which means your feet are more exposed to rubbing and blisters

can develop along with calluses around the heel bone. Worn linings can also be a breeding ground for bacteria, which means that any small injury is more susceptible to infection. Keep an eye out for the way your shoes are wearing away. If wear is uneven, this may be a sign of gait problems that could be corrected. Sorting out gait and movement abnormalities can significantly decrease problems with corns, calluses and blisters.

4. Wear socks to protect your feet: socks made from natural fibres will allow your skin to breathe, while at the same time cushion your feet to prevent rubbing. Wearing shoes without socks is a leading cause of blisters, particularly in warm weather when the feet are more likely to sweat, creating added friction. Socks can help to keep the feet dry and protect against corns between toes, and can provide an extra layer of shock absorption between your feet and the ground to prevent callus build up.

5. Keep feet dry: talc to keep feet dry, particularly in between toes, where corns can pop up from regular rubbing of the skin inside shoes. Applying talc immediately after a shower is a good way to ensure that feet are dry. Dry feet are less prone to friction against the lining of shoes, making corns and blisters avoidable.

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