

## Bunions

If the joint that connects your big toe to your foot has a swollen, sore bump, you may have a bunion. More than one-third of women in America have bunions, a common deformity often blamed on wearing tight, narrow shoes and high heels. Bunions may occur in families, but many are from wearing tight shoes, and nine out of 10 bunions happen to women. Too-tight shoes can also cause other disabling foot problems such as corns, calluses and hammer toes.

With a bunion, the base of your big toe (metatarsophalangeal joint) gets larger and sticks out. The skin over it may be red and tender, and wearing any type of shoe may be painful. This joint flexes with every step you take, so the bigger your bunion gets, the more it hurts to walk. Bursitis (painful swelling) may set in. Your big toe may angle toward your second toe or move all the way under it.

In addition, the skin on the bottom of your foot may become thicker and painful. Pressure from your big toe may force your second toe out of alignment, sometimes overlapping your third toe. An advanced bunion may make your foot look deformed. If your bunion gets too severe, it may be difficult to walk. Your pain may become chronic and you may develop arthritis.



### Relief from Bunions

Most bunions are treatable without surgery. Prevention is always best. To minimize your chances of developing a bunion, never force your foot into a tight shoe that doesn't fit. Choose shoes that conform to the shape of your feet. Go for shoes with wide insteps, broad toes and soft soles. Avoid shoes that are short, tight or sharply pointed, and those with heels higher than 2 1/4 inches.

If you already have a bunion, wear shoes that are roomy enough to not put pressure on it. This should relieve most of your pain. You may want to have your shoes stretched out professionally. You may also try protective pads to cushion the painful area.

If your bunion has progressed to the point where you have difficulty walking or experience pain despite accommodative shoes, you may need surgery. Bunion surgery realigns bone, ligaments, tendons and nerves so your big toe can be brought back to its correct position. Orthopaedic surgeons have several techniques to ease your pain. Many bunion surgeries are done on a same-day basis (no hospital stay) using an ankle-block anesthesia. Recovery usually occurs over a three- to six-month period and may include persistent swelling and stiffness.

### What are the goals of bunion correction surgery?

Bunion correction surgery relieves pain by restoring normal alignment of the first toe joint. This procedure should not be performed so someone can wear fashionable shoes, as this may cause the bunion to come back. The surgery consists of realignment of the bones, soft tissue procedures and/or joint fusions. An orthopaedic foot and ankle surgeon can determine which procedure may be right for you.

### What happens after the surgery?

A dressing will be applied by your surgeon in the operating room, and you will be given a special shoe. You will have to avoid putting weight on the foot or only put weight on the heel for a period of time determined by your surgeon. The dressings are applied to hold the big toe in position, so you should not change the dressings unless told to by your surgeon. Also, the dressings cannot get wet. You will be asked to elevate your foot to chest level for the first few weeks after surgery. You may need to use crutches or a walker the first few days after this surgery. These help to reduce complications as well as pain and swelling. Your doctor may ask you to do range-of-motion exercises (bending the knee, hip or ankle) to maintain flexibility and to avoid stiffness.