

What are hammer, mallet and claw toes?

Hammer, mallet, and claw toes are common and often painful deformities of the feet.



Hammer toes are toes bent down at the middle joint and up at the joint closest to the foot.



With **mallet toes**, toes are bent down at the end joint only.



In **claw toes**, the toes are bent down at both the middle and end joints and bent up at the joint closest to the foot.

All of these deformities can cause painful corns and calluses if they rub on the shoes.

Causes

- These toe deformities are produced by muscle and tendon imbalances that cause the joints to bend.
- The deformity may range in severity from mild and easily correctable to rigid and fixed.
- These problems are most common in females. The high heels and small toe boxes of women's shoes, worn over long periods of time, are major contributing factors.



Treatment

- Wear shoes with high, wide, and long enough toe boxes to avoid direct pressure over the sensitive areas. Soft insoles and soles of the shoe can relieve pressure at the end of the toe. If necessary, an extra-depth shoe can be purchased at a specialty shoe store.
- Cushion pressure spots with pads that are available at local drug or shoe stores.
- In early flexible toe deformities, toe/foot exercises can help prevent or slow the progression of the deformity. (See Foot Exercises Handout.)
- Shoe leather can also be relaxed over the deformed toe to relieve pressure.
- To decrease pressure at the end of the toe, your doctor may prescribe a special insole (orthotic) and/or pad under the toe.
- Surgery can correct the deformity. The type of surgery depends on the amount of flexibility of the toe and the joint involved. The doctor will discuss your specific surgery with you. This surgery is usually performed on an outpatient basis.