

Corns and Calluses

What are corns and calluses?

Corns and calluses are areas of tough, thickened skin caused by pressure or friction. Calluses usually appear on the palms, fingertips, or soles of the feet. Corns are smaller than calluses and form on the toes.

What is the cause?

Corns and calluses on the feet can be caused by:

- New, tight, or poorly fitting shoes
- Sandals or shoes worn without socks, which leads to friction
- High-heeled shoes
- High arches in your feet that put pressure on the tips of your toes when you walk
- Changes in the bones of your foot, like bunions, that push your skin against your shoe
- Not enough flesh cushioning the bones of your feet
- Any injury or other physical problem that changes how you walk and how much weight you put on each foot

Calluses are often associated with certain types of work or sports. Tennis and baseball players develop calluses on their hands, manual laborers on their hands, joggers on the soles of their feet, and violinists and guitarists on their fingertips. For some activities it may be good to have calluses because they help keep you from getting blisters.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of corns and calluses include:

- A hard, tough area of thickened skin
- Tenderness or pain under the skin.

How are they diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will examine you. You may have an X-ray to see if you have any physical deformity that could cause a corn or callus.

How are they treated?

Most of the time you don't need to see your healthcare provider for treatment. You may need to see your provider if:

- A corn or callus does not heal and is painful.
- A corn or callus tends to crack open and so could get infected.

Your healthcare provider may:

- Trim or remove the thickened skin
- Recommend surgery if you have a fixable physical deformity, such as a prominent or misshapen bone, that causes the corn or callus to form
- Fit you with a special insert for your shoe

If you have diabetes, it is very important to take excellent care of your feet. Injury to your feet is a possible source of infection, chronic sores, and skin ulcers. If you have a corn or callus, tell your healthcare provider right away so you can get it treated safely. Then ask your provider to teach you how to prevent corns and calluses in the future and how to care for your feet every day at home. You may need to see a foot specialist (called a podiatrist).

How can I take care of myself?

Corns and calluses usually go away in 1 to 4 weeks after:

- You stop the activity that caused a callus.
- You stop wearing shoes that are causing problems.
- You start a program to protect or soften the skin.

Here are some things you can do:

- Wear comfortable shoes until the corn or callus goes away.
- If your general state of health is good, you may want to try one of the following measures (diabetics and older adults should consult their healthcare provider first):
 - Use a file or pumice stone to rub away excess skin and soften your skin. It works best to do this after bathing. Keep doing this daily until the callus or corn goes away. Wear a protective pad on the area to keep it from happening again.
 - Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist about salicylic acid liquid, gel, and plaster products you can buy to soften and remove dead skin.
- Apply a skin-softening cream to help the skin return to normal and to prevent cracking of the corn or callus.

How can I help prevent corns and calluses?

It may be hard to keep calluses from developing on your hands and fingers, depending on how you use them. In some cases it's good to have calluses because they may keep you from getting blisters caused by certain activities.

Corns and calluses on your feet are generally the most bothersome. You can avoid getting them or help prevent them from coming back if you:

- Wear shoes that fit properly and are designed for comfortable walking, running, or standing
- Wear a protective pad where you had a callus before to help keep it from coming back
- Use a skin cream to keep the skin soft

- Have corrective surgery if you have a problem with the bones in your foot that causes calluses to develop
- Have shoes custom made for you

Developed by RelayHealth.

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