

Hammer Toe: Care Instructions

Overview

A hammer toe is a toe that bends up at the middle joint, while the end of the toe points down. The problem usually happens to the second toe.

A hammer toe can hurt a lot, especially as the toe rubs against your shoe when you walk. Shoes that are too tight can cause hammer toes. If a shoe forces a toe to stay bent for a long time, the muscles in your toe get tight and the tendons that connect the muscles to the bone get shorter. Over time, the muscles cannot straighten your toe. Sometimes, diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis also can cause hammer toes.

Early treatment can help your toe straighten before it gets badly bent. You can wear roomy shoes and use pads to keep the toe from rubbing against your shoes. If your toe is badly bent, you may need surgery to straighten it.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Wear shoes that have lots of room in the toes. Do not wear narrow, high-heeled shoes.
- Follow your doctor's directions for wearing a splint on your toe, if you are given one.
- Gently stretch your toe with your fingers.
- Use toe pads or corn cushions to keep the toe from rubbing against your shoes. This may keep a corn from forming on the top of the toe.
- Wear a shoe insert, or orthotic, to cushion the bottom of the bent toe.

When should you call for help?

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- Your pain gets worse.
- Your toe still bothers you even after you wear proper shoes and pads or cushions.
- You want to know more about surgery to straighten your toe.

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