

# Bunion

## A Case of Form Following Function

### What is it?

A bunion is a bony bump located at the base of the big toe. It can be painful when it rubs against the shoe. Hallux abducto valgus is the medical term used to describe the position of the big toe, and is generally used together with the term bunion which describes the enlarged joint. Bunions are one of the most common big toe problems.

Symptoms of a bunion include redness, swelling or pain at the base of the big toe. Initially a bunion may present as non-painful deviation of your big toe towards the others. As the big toe progresses towards the others, calluses, corns and deformities of the other toes occur. You may also experience limited big toe motion.

### How did I get it?

A bunion forms when the big toe moves out of place as the fore foot presses into the ground with every step. A bunion is the result of a flattened arch and how that causes the forefoot to spread out abnormally. As the forefoot spreads out, the big toe is forced to angle inwards towards the second toe.

Over time, after many millions of steps like this, the big toe gradually becomes “set” in this deformed position. In other words, the bunion is usually the end result of a long period of incorrect foot function due to a flattened arch of the foot.

Your big toe is the big toe for a reason: it is designed to bear most of your weight when you walk. When the big toe is not functioning properly (as in the case of a bunion) it is unable to take its normal load. This may be compensated for in the other joints and you may experience symptoms in your feet, knees, hips and low back.

Bunions are not directly inherited, but they can run in families. What can be inherited is your foot type, and some foot types (usually flexible, flat feet) are more prone to bunion formation than others.

Most medical information sites will tell you that bunions are the result of wearing narrow, pointy shoes that crowd the toes together. While this may not be helpful, it is hardly the “cause” of such a major

deformity. The real cause is the lack of structural integrity and altered function in a flexible, flat foot over time.

### How is it treated?

The best treatment would address the underlying cause of the bunion. This requires a restorative change to the foot’s posture and function: giving the foot a healthy arch that resists flattening.

### Custom Orthotics

Custom made orthotics from *Sole Supports*™ will address your bunion by correcting the cause of your foot dysfunction. Abnormal joint positions can be reversed allowing affected tissues to heal and normal joint function to be restored. In this way the orthotic provides both primary treatment and preventative care.

*Sole Supports*™, unlike typical custom orthotics, are designed to completely support the corrected arch of your foot, determined by a unique way of capturing your optimal foot posture.

This truly restores proper foot function.

When this is done, the cause of your bunion is being addressed rather than just the symptoms.

### Conventional Treatment

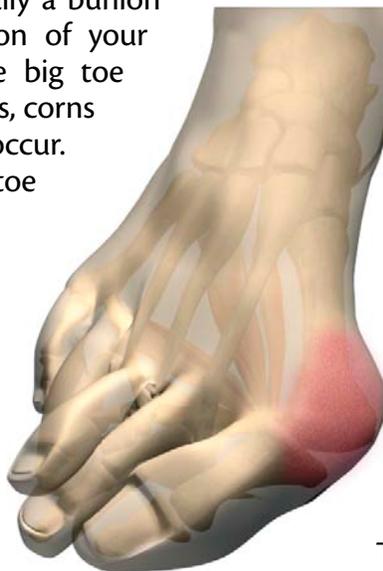
Naturally most people want immediate relief and may not have access to *Sole Supports* orthotics, so the focus of conventional bunion treatment is to relieve pressure on the bunion and any symptoms that may be present.

### Footwear Modifications

Correct fitting shoes are essential to addressing the pain from a bunion that may be caused by rubbing against the inside of the shoe. Corns and calluses should be treated as well. Felt padding can be used to buffer the bunion against the shoe. Padding can also be placed in between the big toe and the second toe which may lessen some of the pain. Keep in mind that these options can help the symptoms, but do not address the cause of your bunions.

### Exercises and Splints

Exercises can be performed that may help keep the



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joint mobile. A night splint can be worn to try and prevent a loss of mobility. Night splints are more effective when used with young patients who still have considerable mobility in their joints.

### Surgery

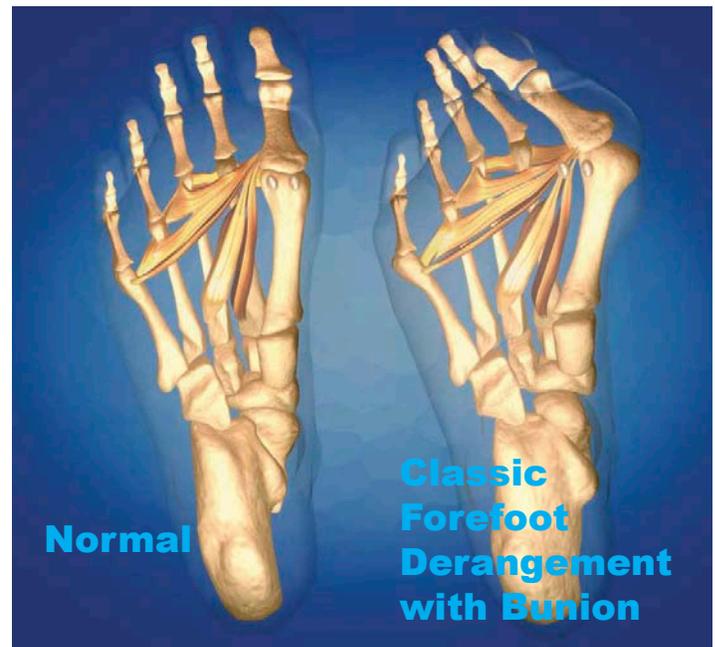
The type of surgery varies with the type and severity of the bunion. Often your doctor will take an x-ray to measure how much deformity has occurred. Surgery is often indicated in moderate to severe bunions and bunions that do not respond to conservative measures.

Surgery is often done on an outpatient basis. The most common type of surgery involves realigning the bones of your big toe. Ligaments and tendons may be tightened and the bunion may be shaved away. If your bunion requires surgery, it is crucial that the cause of the problem is also addressed. Failure to do this may result in additional surgery when your bunion returns in a few years.

### What can I expect from treatment?

Conventional treatment may or may not produce significant symptomatic relief depending on the timeliness of care. Relief of symptoms is not a cure, however, and without the right orthotics it is not likely to last. It is common to achieve permanent bunion arrest or reversal with the right orthotics – especially in mild to moderate cases. Even in severe cases, *Sole Supports*™ are indicated to help restore proper function to the foot. The time to symptom resolution varies with the type, severity and maturity of your bunion. Your age and the mobility of your joints is also a factor in your recovery. *Sole Supports*™ are critical to avoid re-occurrence after surgery as well.

*This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your health care provider.*



*This video demonstrates how the repetitive splay of the forefoot during walking eventually leads to a bunion. The foot gradually assumes a permanently deformed shape that mirrors the shape it assumed due to poor function.*