

Patient information

Corns and Callus

What are corns and callus?

When we walk or stand, our body weight is carried first on the heel and then on the ball of the foot where the skin is thicker to withstand the pressure. When this pressure becomes excessive, some areas of skin thicken and form corns and callus, as a protective response to the friction of skin rubbing against a bone, shoe or the ground. They are not serious but can be painful in some circumstances.

Callus (or callosity) is an extended area of thickened, hard skin on the sole of the foot. It is usually symptomatic of an underlying problem such as a bony deformity, a particular style of walking or inappropriate footwear. Some people have a natural tendency to form callus because of their skin type. Elderly people have less fatty tissue in their skin and this can lead to callus forming on the ball of the foot.



Corns are caused by pressure or friction over bony areas, such as a joint, and they have a central core which may cause pain if it presses on a nerve. There are five different types of corns, the most common of which are 'hard' and 'soft' corns:

Hard corns – these are the most common and appear as a small area of concentrated hard skin up to the size of a small pea usually within a wider area of thickened skin or callus. This may be a symptom of the feet or toes not functioning properly



Soft corns – these develop in a similar way to hard corns but they are whitish and rubbery in texture and appear between the toes where the skin is moist from sweat or from inadequate drying



Seed corns – these are tiny corns that tend to occur either singly or in clusters on the bottom of the foot and are usually painless



Vascular/neurovascular corns – these are corns that have both nerve fibres and blood vessels in them. They can be very painful and can bleed profusely if cut

Fibrous corns – these arise when corns have been present for a long time and are more firmly attached to the deeper tissues than any other type of corn. They may also be painful

What are the treatments?

It is not advisable to cut corns yourself, especially if you are elderly with a poor immune system or have poor circulation or have diabetes. A podiatrist will be able to reduce the bulk of the corn and give advice about astringents to cut down on sweat retention between the toes in soft corns.

Always consult a health care professional for advice before using commercially available products. In particular be careful about using corn plasters, as they contain acids that can burn the healthy skin around the corn, leading to serious problems such as infection. Home remedies, like lamb's wool around the toes, are potentially dangerous as they can restrict circulation to the toes and cause serious harm.

People with diabetes, poor circulation or a reduced immune system should not self-treat, but instead seek advice from a podiatrist.

A podiatrist will be able to remove corns painlessly, apply padding or insoles to relieve pressure or fit corrective appliances for long-term relief. For callus, your podiatrist will also be able to remove hard skin, relieve pain and redistribute pressure with soft padding, strapping or corrective appliances that fit easily into your shoes. The skin should then return to its normal state.

Elderly people can benefit from padding to the ball of the foot, to compensate for any loss of natural padding. Emollient creams delay callus building up and help improve the skin's natural elasticity. Your podiatrist will be able to advise you on the best skin preparations for your needs.

You may also need to wear more supportive or wider fitting footwear to reduce pressure on the affected area.

How can I prevent them?

If you have corns or callus, you can treat them yourself occasionally by gently rubbing with a pumice stone or a foot file when you are in the bath and applying moisturising cream to help soften thickened skin a little at a time, or relieve pressure between the toes with a foam wedge. Do not self-treat if you have diabetes, poor circulation or a reduced immune system. Instead seek help from a podiatrist.

- wear thick, cushioned socks
- wear wide, comfortable shoes with a low heel and soft sole that do not rub
- use soft insoles or heel pads in your shoes

For more information

If you require any assistance, then please contact Podiatry services on 0300 1314536

Or email

Esh-tr.podiatryenquiries@nhs.net

Sources of information.

East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust <https://www.esht.nhs.uk/service/podiatry/>

The Health and Care Professions Council www.hcpc-uk.org

The Royal College of Podiatry www.cop.uk

NHS choices www.nhs.uk

Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: 0300 131 4731 (direct dial) or by email at: esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net

Hand hygiene

The Trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.

Tel: 0300 131 4500 Email: esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:
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The directorate group that have agreed this patient information leaflet:
Community Health and Integrated Care

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