

Hammer Toe



Overview

This condition is a deformity in which a toe bends downward at the middle joint. The second toe is the one most likely to be affected, but this deformity can occur in other toes as well. Sometimes, more than one toe is affected.

Causes

Hammer toe can be caused by certain types of footwear - especially women's shoes - that put pressure on the toes and don't provide proper space for them. High-heeled shoes and shoes with narrow toe boxes are common culprits. These can force the toes to bend into an abnormal position. Hammer toe can also develop as a result of injury, nerve damage, a muscle imbalance in the toes, or a bunion that pushes the big toe out of alignment.

Symptoms

The most obvious symptom of hammer toe is a downward, claw-like bend in the toe at the middle joint. The toe will be flexible at first, but without treatment it can become rigid. A hammer toe may be painful, and movement can be difficult. Corns and calluses may form as the toe rubs against the shoe.

Treatment

Treatment will vary depending upon the stage of the condition. Conservative treatment options include flat shoes with roomy toe boxes, and the use of inserts, pads or cushions. Toe exercises may help stretch and strengthen the toe muscles. If these options are not successful, surgery may be needed to straighten the toe.