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Corns and calluses

Corns and calluses are thick layers of skin. They are caused by repeated pressure or friction at the spot where the corn or callus develops.

Causes

Corns and calluses are caused by pressure or friction on skin. A corn is thickened skin on the top or side of a toe. Most of the time it is caused by bad-fitting shoes. A callus is thickened skin on your hands or the soles of your feet.

The thickening of the skin is a protective reaction. For example, farmers and rowers get calluses on their hands that prevent blisters from forming. People with bunions often develop a callus over the bunion because it rubs against the shoe.

Corns and calluses may be painful but are not serious problems for most people.

Symptoms

Symptoms may include:

- Skin is thick and hardened.
- Skin may be flaky and dry.
- Hardened, thick skin areas are found on hands, feet, or other areas that may be rubbed or pressed.
- The affected areas can be painful and may bleed.

Exams and Tests

Your health care provider will make the diagnosis after looking at your skin. In most cases, tests are not needed.

Treatment

Preventing friction is often the only treatment needed.

To treat corns:

- If poor fitting shoes are causing the corn, changing to shoes with a better fit will help get rid of the problem most of the time.
- Protect the corn with a doughnut-shaped corn pad while it is healing. You can buy these at most drug stores.

To treat calluses:

- Calluses often occur due to excess pressure placed on the skin because of another problem such as bunions or hammertoes. Proper treatment of any underlying condition should prevent the calluses from returning.
- Wear gloves to protect your hands during activities that cause friction (such as gardening and weight lifting) to help prevent calluses.

If an infection or ulcer occurs in an area of a callus or corn, the tissue may need to be removed by a provider. You may need to take antibiotics.

Outlook (Prognosis)

Corns and calluses are rarely serious. They should improve with proper treatment and not cause long-term problems.

Possible Complications

Complications of corns and calluses are rare. People with diabetes or problems with the nerves in their toes are prone to ulcers and infections and should regularly examine their feet to identify any problems right away. Such foot injuries need medical attention.

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Check your feet carefully if you have diabetes or numbness in the feet or toes.

Otherwise, the problem should resolve with changing to better-fitting shoes or wearing gloves.

Call your provider if:

- You have diabetes and notice problems with your feet.
- You think your corn or callus is not getting better with treatment.
- You have continued symptoms of pain, redness, warmth, or drainage from the area.

Alternative Names

Calluses and corns

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