

# Patient Information Sheet - Bunions



## What is a bunion (Hallux Valgus)?

- The medical term for bunions is hallux (big toe) valgus (knock-kneed).
- A bunion presents as a painful bony bump, but it isn't new bone, just normal bone that is made prominent by the toe drifting over.
- Bunions are caused by a variety of things and progress slowly.



**Bunion**

## What causes bunions?

- Years of abnormal foot pressures.
- Poor footwear is a major cause. High heels, no laces, narrow toes are the worst choices.
- Your family history. Most patients with bunions have family members that also have bunions.
- Some inflammatory conditions or conditions that affect the shape of your foot (ex. Rheumatoid arthritis/diabetes).

## How do you know you have a bunion?

- You will see a noticeable bump at the base of your big toe.
- There is pain over the bump, or near the base of the second toe.
- You may have limited movement in your big toe and there may be redness or inflammation.
- Pain often gets worse when wearing tight shoes and/or increased activity.
- Your physician will take a history and do an examination to confirm that you have a bunion. They will require an x-ray of your foot for this.

## What is the treatment for bunions?

- Treatment for bunions can be nonsurgical or surgical. Most are treated non-surgically.

### Nonsurgical

- Changes in Footwear (see the back of this sheet for suggestions).
- Pads can be placed over the bunion to decrease the pressure and thereby decrease the pain. Be sure that the pad does not increase the pressure on the deformity. Many drug stores carry these pads.
- Toe spacers can be placed between the big toe and the second toe to decrease the bunion deformity which may decrease the bunion symptoms. Bunion splints may be used at night.
- Orthotics (special shoe inserts) to take the pressure off of the bunion can be bought over the counter or custom made.
- Activity modification- avoid any activity that causes pain, including standing for long periods of time.
- Icing- applying an ice pack several times a day for 20 minutes at a time can reduce pain and inflammation. Ice should not be applied directly on your skin.
- Medications: oral non-steroidal (NSAIDS) such as ibuprofen/Advil© may help to reduce pain and inflammation.
- NONE of the above interventions prevent the formation or progression of bunions.

### Surgical

- There are a variety of surgeries that can be done to correct bunion deformities. They all involve different combinations of bone removal, realigning bones, releasing and adjusting soft tissues. Sometimes the joint is even fused. Although the joint doesn't move anymore, the foot stays straight.

- Recovery from surgery can be painful and take from 6 months to 1 year for all of the swelling to go away. Depending on the type of surgery you had you may not be able to put full weight on your foot for several weeks.

### Selecting Proper Footwear

- Select shoes based on how they feel, not the size of the shoe.
- Have your feet measured. As we get older our feet get larger.
- They generally increase by a size after pregnancy.
- Often our feet are not the same size. Select shoes that fit your larger foot.
- Ensure that there is space at the end of the shoe for your longest toe (approximately ½ inch).
- Do not purchase shoes that feel too tight. Shoes do not often stretch to fit your foot.
- Try shoes on at the end of the day when your feet are likely to be the largest.
- Shoes should have a wide toe box and be shaped like your foot.
- The ball of your foot should fit into the widest part of your shoe.
- Your heel should fit nicely in the shoe, ensure that there is minimal slippage.
- Choose shoes that are made of a soft material such as leather.
- Keep in mind that slip-on shoes often need to be tighter in order to stay on the foot. Ensure that slip-on shoes are not too tight. Lace-ups are better because they don't squish the end of your foot. Avoid pointed shoes for that reason.
- High heels are like a slide pushing your toes into the end of your shoe.
- When purchasing shoes walk around in them for a while.

Remember: Select for comfort not for fashion!

