

Corns and calluses

Corns and calluses are thickened layers of skin caused by repeated pressure or friction.

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, usually from shoes that do not fit properly. 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 callused hands that prevent them from getting painful blisters. People with bunions often develop a callus over the bunion because it rubs against the shoe.

Neither corns nor calluses are serious conditions.

Symptoms

- 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.
- Exams and Tests

Your health care provider will make the diagnosis after observing the skin. In most cases tests are not necessary.

Treatment

Usually, preventing friction is the only treatment needed. If a corn is the result of a poor-fitting shoe, changing to shoes that fit properly will usually eliminate the corn within a couple of weeks. Until then, protect the skin with donut-shaped corn pads, available in pharmacies. If desired, use a pumice stone to gently wear down the corn.

Calluses on the hands can be treated by wearing gloves during activities that cause friction, such as gardening and weight lifting.

If an infection or ulcer occurs in an area of a callus or corn, unhealthy tissue may need to be removed by a health care provider and treatment with antibiotics may be necessary.

Calluses often reflect undue pressure placed on the skin because of an underlying problem such as bunions. Proper treatment of any underlying condition should prevent the calluses from returning.

Outlook (Prognosis)

Corns and calluses are rarely serious. If treated properly, they should improve without causing long-term problems.

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Possible Complications

Complications of corns and calluses are rare. People with diabetes 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

Very closely check your feet if you have diabetes or numbness in the feet or toes. If you have diabetes and notice problems with your feet, contact your health care provider.

Otherwise, simply changing to better-fitting shoes or wearing gloves should resolve most problems with corns and calluses.

If you suspect that your corn or callus is infected or is not getting better despite treatment, contact your health care provider. Also call your health care provider if you have continued symptoms of pain, redness, warmth, or drainage.

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