

# What Is a Corn and How Do You Treat It?

A small, hardened spot on your toe may not look serious, but a painful corn can make every step uncomfortable. It may rub against your shoes, sting when pressure is applied, or gradually become more sensitive as the thickened skin builds up.

A corn is the skin's response to repeated pressure or friction. Although corns are common, they're often misunderstood and mistaken for calluses, warts, or other skin conditions.

At [Idaho Foot & Ankle Center](#), we evaluate painful foot lesions to determine exactly what they are and why they developed. Our goal isn't simply to reduce the thickened skin. We look for the source of the pressure so we can provide relief and help keep the problem from returning.

Our professional care for [calluses & corns](#) is designed around your foot structure, symptoms, health, footwear, and daily activities.

## What Is a Corn on Your Foot?

A corn is a small, concentrated area of thickened skin that develops when one part of the foot experiences repeated rubbing or pressure.

The skin thickens to protect the tissue underneath. Over time, that protective response may create a firm center that presses deeper into the foot and becomes painful.

Corns most commonly form on or between the toes, especially over bony areas that rub against footwear. They may also develop where two toes press against each other.

Idaho Foot & Ankle Center explains that corns and calluses develop when repeated friction or pressure occurs over a bony prominence. Even a relatively small amount of pressure can create thickened skin when it continues for a long time.

A corn isn't contagious, and it isn't caused by an infection. However, it may signal an underlying pressure problem that needs professional attention.

## What Does a Foot Corn Look and Feel Like?

A corn usually appears as a round or cone-shaped patch of hardened skin. It often has a dense center surrounded by irritated or inflamed skin.

Common signs include:

- A small raised bump of thickened skin
- A hard or waxy center
- Tenderness when direct pressure is applied
- Pain while wearing shoes
- Redness or irritation around the area

- A burning or aching sensation
- Discomfort when walking or standing

Hard corns are commonly found on the tops or outer sides of the toes. Mayo Clinic notes that they often have a firm center and may be painful.

Soft corns usually develop between the toes, where moisture keeps the skin from becoming completely hard. They may appear pale, rubbery, or irritated.

Corns can be small but surprisingly painful because the center may press into sensitive tissue beneath the skin.

## What Causes Corns to Form?

Corns form when the foot experiences repeated mechanical pressure. The body responds by producing more skin cells in the affected area.

Improperly fitting shoes are one of the most common causes. Shoes that are too tight can squeeze the toes, while loose shoes may allow the foot to slide and rub repeatedly.

Other possible causes include:

- A toe rubbing against the inside of a shoe
- Two toes pressing against each other
- A prominent joint or bone
- Hammertoes or curled toes
- Bunions
- Changes in the way you walk
- Uneven pressure beneath the foot
- Reduced cushioning over a bony area
- Previous injuries that changed foot alignment
- Footwear that concentrates pressure in one place

A corn may return after the hardened skin is removed if the underlying pressure remains. That's why identifying the cause is such an important part of treatment.

Our broader [foot & ankle services](#) allow us to evaluate the corn along with the bones, joints, tendons, nerves, and movement patterns that may be contributing to it.

## What Is the Difference Between a Corn and a Callus?

Corns and calluses are both areas of thickened skin, but they usually differ in shape, location, and sensitivity.

A corn tends to be smaller, more defined, and more likely to hurt when pressed. It often forms on or between the toes.

A callus is generally broader and more spread out. Calluses frequently develop on weight-bearing areas, such as the ball or heel of the foot.

Mayo Clinic describes calluses as areas that commonly form on the soles of the feet, vary in shape and size, and are usually less painful than corns.

Both conditions develop in response to pressure or friction. The main difference is how that pressure is distributed.

A focused point of pressure is more likely to create a corn. Pressure spread over a larger area is more likely to create a callus.

## Is It a Corn, a Wart, or Another Skin Problem?

Several foot conditions can resemble one another, especially when they appear as small, hardened, or painful spots.

A plantar wart may be mistaken for a corn because both can create thickened skin and discomfort. However, warts are caused by a virus, while corns result from pressure.

Warts may interrupt the normal lines of the skin and sometimes contain tiny dark spots from clotted blood vessels. Corns are more likely to have a dense central core located directly over an area of pressure.

Other possible look-alikes include:

- Calluses
- Blisters
- Foreign objects beneath the skin
- Cysts
- Skin lesions
- Pressure sores
- Infected tissue
- Less common forms of abnormal skin growth

A visual guess isn't always reliable. A professional examination helps ensure that the condition is treated correctly.

Our team also evaluates [warts](#) and [skin lesions](#) when a painful spot doesn't have the typical appearance of a corn.

## How Does a Podiatrist Diagnose a Corn?

A podiatry evaluation begins with a close examination of the affected area.

We look at its size, texture, location, depth, and response to pressure. We also examine the surrounding skin and determine whether the normal skin lines continue through the lesion.

The location often provides an important clue. A corn sitting directly over a prominent toe joint may point to a structural alignment issue.

We may also evaluate:

- Your footwear
- The position of your toes
- The way your foot bears weight
- Your walking pattern
- Joint flexibility
- Areas of repeated rubbing
- Circulation
- Sensation and nerve function
- Signs of infection or skin breakdown

Imaging may be appropriate if we suspect a bone spur, deformity, arthritis, or another structural cause.

This detailed assessment allows us to treat the actual source of the problem instead of focusing only on the visible skin.

## How Do Podiatrists Treat Corns?

Professional corn treatment is based on the corn's location, severity, cause, and effect on your daily life.

One part of treatment may involve carefully reducing the thickened skin. This can relieve pressure on the sensitive tissue beneath it.

The hardened area may be trimmed with specialized sterile instruments during an office visit. This is performed with precision to reduce discomfort while protecting the healthy skin around it.

Depending on the cause, treatment may also include:

- Professionally selected padding
- Pressure-relieving devices
- Prescription orthotics
- Footwear recommendations
- Toe supports or separators
- Treatment of an underlying deformity
- Ongoing monitoring for high-risk patients
- Surgical correction in selected cases

The best treatment isn't necessarily the one that removes the most skin. It's the one that reduces the mechanical pressure causing the corn.

## Why Shouldn't a Painful Corn Be Ignored?

A corn may begin as a minor inconvenience, but continued pressure can make it increasingly painful.

Some people gradually change the way they walk to avoid the sore area. That altered movement may place additional strain on another part of the foot, ankle, knee, or leg.

A corn may also crack, become inflamed, or create skin damage beneath the hardened surface.

The risk is greater for patients with diabetes, poor circulation, reduced sensation, or other conditions that affect healing.

In these cases, the discomfort caused by a corn may not accurately reflect the severity of the tissue damage. A person with reduced sensation may have significant pressure or skin breakdown without feeling much pain.

## How Are Hammertoes Connected to Corns?

A hammertoe causes a toe joint to remain bent instead of lying flat. The raised joint may rub directly against the top of a shoe.

That repeated contact often creates a hard corn over the joint. Corns may also form on the tip of the toe if the deformity pushes it downward.

Treating only the skin may provide temporary relief, but the corn can return as long as the bent toe continues creating pressure.

Our professional care for [hammertoes](#) addresses both the painful skin buildup and the structural problem contributing to it.

Treatment depends on whether the toe remains flexible or has become rigid. Earlier evaluation may provide more nonsurgical options.

## Can Bunions Cause Corns?

A bunion changes the alignment of the big toe and may crowd the smaller toes.

As the toes become compressed, pressure can develop between them or against the shoe. Corns may then form in areas that didn't previously rub.

A bunion may also make it difficult to find footwear that provides enough room without slipping elsewhere.

When corns develop alongside [bunions](#), we assess the entire forefoot. This allows us to determine whether the corn is an isolated skin problem or part of a larger alignment issue.

Correcting the cause may be necessary for lasting relief when the bunion is severe or progressive.

## Why Are Corns More Concerning for People With Diabetes?

Diabetes can affect sensation, circulation, and the body's ability to heal.

A corn creates concentrated pressure against the skin. In a patient with reduced sensation, that pressure may continue unnoticed and damage the tissue underneath.

A seemingly minor spot can develop into an open sore or become infected. This is why corns should be professionally evaluated rather than dismissed as routine skin buildup.

Our [diabetic foot care](#) focuses on identifying pressure areas early and protecting the health of the foot.

Patients with [diabetic peripheral neuropathy](#) may not feel pain, heat, rubbing, or injury normally. Regular professional foot evaluations can help detect problems before they become more serious.

## Can Corns Come Back After Treatment?

Yes. A corn can return if the same pressure continues after the thickened skin has been reduced.

Recurrence is especially common when the cause involves foot structure, toe position, or a prominent bone.

A lasting treatment strategy may involve changing how pressure is distributed across the foot. Orthotics, specialized padding, footwear adjustments, or treatment of an underlying deformity may all play a role.

We also consider how your work, exercise, and daily routines affect the problem.

Someone who spends long hours standing may need a different plan than someone whose corn develops from a rigid toe rubbing inside a narrow shoe.

The goal is to create a treatment plan that fits your actual life while addressing the source of irritation.

## When Should You See a Podiatrist for a Corn?

A corn should be evaluated when it is painful, persistent, repeatedly returns, or interferes with normal walking.

Professional care is also important when:

- The diagnosis is uncertain
- The skin is red, warm, swollen, or draining
- There is bleeding or an open sore
- The corn is rapidly changing
- You have diabetes
- You have poor circulation
- You have numbness or reduced sensation
- The area remains painful despite previous care
- A toe deformity is creating ongoing pressure
- Several corns are forming in different areas

Our website advises patients to seek professional answers when a corn, callus, wart, rash, or painful spot isn't improving.

You can review information for [new patients](#) before your first appointment, including available patient forms and office guidance.

## Get Lasting Relief From a Painful Foot Corn

A corn is your skin's response to pressure, but it shouldn't be allowed to dictate how you walk, work, or spend your day.

Removing the hardened skin may ease discomfort temporarily. Finding and treating the cause of the pressure is what creates the best opportunity for lasting relief.

Our experienced [our podiatrists](#) provide comprehensive foot and ankle care for patients in Idaho Falls and throughout Eastern Idaho. We evaluate the skin, foot structure, footwear, circulation, sensation, and movement patterns that may be contributing to your symptoms.

You don't have to keep adjusting your steps around a painful spot. [Contact our support team to get more info](#) and schedule a professional evaluation. We'll identify what you're dealing with and create a treatment plan focused on comfort, mobility, and long-term foot health.

## Related Questions

Can children develop foot corns?

Yes. Children may develop corns when footwear creates repeated pressure or when a toe or foot alignment issue causes rubbing. A professional examination can determine why the corn formed.

Do corns have roots?

Corns don't have biological roots. However, the dense central core may extend deeper into the thickened skin and create the sensation that the corn is rooted in the foot.

Can a corn become infected?

A corn itself isn't an infection, but damaged or cracked skin around it may allow bacteria to enter. Redness, warmth, swelling, drainage, or worsening pain should be evaluated promptly.

Are corns more common as people age?

They can become more common with age as the skin's natural cushioning decreases and structural foot changes create new pressure points.