



Corns & Calluses

Patient Information

What are they?

A **Corn** is a small area of skin which has become thickened due to having pressure on it. Corns press into the deeper layers of skin and can be painful, they are roughly round in shape.

- **Hard corns** commonly occur on the top of the smaller toes or on the outer side of the little toe. These are the areas where poorly fitted shoes tend to rub most.
- **Soft corns** sometimes form in between the toes, most commonly between the fourth and fifth toes. These are softer because the sweat between the toes keeps them moist. Soft corns can sometimes become infected.

A **Callus** is usually larger and broader than a corn and has a less well-defined edge. These tend to form on the underside of the foot (the sole). They commonly form over the bony area just underneath the toes, this weight bearing area takes much of the bodies weight when walking. They are usually painless but can become painful.

What causes it?

The small bones of the toes and feet are broader and more lumpy near to the small joints of the toes. If there is repeated friction or pressure on the skin overlying a small rough area of bone, this will cause the skin to thicken. Which may lead to corns or calluses forming.

The common causes of corns are the rubbing and pressure of tight or ill-fitting shoes, these tend to cause corns on the top of the toes and the side of the little toe.

The common cause of calluses are usually from too much walking or running which tends to cause calluses on the bottom of the feet (the soles).

Corns and calluses are more likely to develop on very prominent bony toes, thin skin, or any deformities of the toes or feet which cause the skin to rub more easily inside shoes. People with bunions are more likely to develop corns and calluses.

How do I treat it?

Trimming (paring down) -The thickened skin of a corn or callus can be pared down by a Foot Health Professional using a scalpel blade. The pain is usually much reduced when the corn or callus is pared down as the pressure on the underlying tissues is eased. Sometimes, repeated or regular trimming sessions are needed. Once a corn or callus has been pared down, it may not return if footwear is changed.

If the skin seems to be thickening up again, a recurrence may be prevented by rubbing down the thickening skin with a pumice stone or some emery paper once a week, many people can do this themselves. It is best to soak the foot in warm water first for about 20 minutes to soften the thick skin before using a pumice stone or emery paper. A moisturising cream used regularly on a trimmed corn or callus will keep the skin softened and easier to rub down.

Chemical treatment - There are different types of medicated products which work by chemically paring down the thickened, dead skin on corns and calluses. These usually contain salicylic acid, which is also present in many wart-removal products.

Salicylic acid is a keratolytic, which means it dissolves the protein (keratin) that makes up most of the corn and the thick layer of dead skin usually over the top of it. Salicylic acid treatments are available in different forms including drops, pads and plasters. All these treatments work well and will turn the top of the skin white causing dead tissue, which can then be trimmed or peeled off.

It is important to use these products as directed; they are gentle and safe for most people. Although they should **not** be used for people with diabetes or poor circulation because skin is less likely to heal after using salicylic acid and there is a risk that an ulcer may develop.

Depending on the site of a corn or callus, a cushioning pad or shoe insole may be of benefit. For example, for a callus under the foot, a soft shoe insert may cushion the skin and help the callus to heal. If there is a corn between the toes, a sleeve can be worn around the toe to help ease the pressure or a toe splint to keep the toes apart allowing the corn between toes to heal. A Foot Health Professional will be able to advise on any appropriate padding, insoles or appliances that may be needed.