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Corns and Calluses

Our feet play an important role in keeping us mobile. When we walk or stand, our feet carry the burden of our body weight as well as bearing the various pressures of movement and constraints of our footwear. Sometimes pressure placed on the foot becomes out of balance and extra friction falls on a particular area of the foot. When this happens, the body may respond to the pressure by producing the thickened areas of skin we know as corns and calluses. These seemingly minor skin conditions can be incredibly painful and can stop you in your tracks.

Common sites of corns and calluses are the ball of the foot, under the big toe, tips of toes and any bony prominence. 'Soft' corns may develop between the toes, where the skin is moist from sweat or inadequate drying. Sometimes, the pressure of the corn or callus may produce inflammation, which can result in pain, swelling and redness.

What are corns and calluses?

- **Calluses** form on areas of the foot that are weight bearing and therefore subject to force as you move around. Characterised by hard, sometimes large patches of skin, calluses are a common consequence of an active lifestyle. Calluses can be caused by walking imbalances or poorly fitted shoes and can become painful when the build-up is excessive.
- **Corns** are areas of calluses which build up. Corns can be caused by shoes rubbing and creating pressure against bony areas of the foot. They can also be caused by friction between toes. Corns are characterised by small circular areas that are hard and funnel-like in the centre and can be very painful or feel like a stone in your shoe. If left untreated they can grow down into the tissue of your feet and cause infections and ulcers.

How are they treated?

It is important that you never cut corns or calluses yourself. In the warm, moist confines of enclosed shoes, infections can easily develop and small cuts can quickly become serious wounds.

To treat painful corns, your podiatrist will use sterile instruments to gently remove the area of hard skin. We will help with isolating the cause and preventing the problem from recurring. Soft padding, strapping and foam/silicone devices can be used to improve comfort and prevent re-occurrence.

They may also discuss the type of footwear most likely to cause corns and calluses. In some cases, special shoe inserts (orthoses) may be prescribed to reduce excessive weight-bearing forces on the foot and provide long-term relief.

People with diabetes and other conditions that lead to loss of sensitivity in the feet are more prone to these skin conditions and are at increased risk of minor skin problems becoming more serious. It is therefore very important to see a podiatrist regularly so these conditions can be treated before they become infected.