

# Bunion (Hallux Valgus)

Non-Operative Versus Operative Management  
CU Orthopedic Surgery - Foot & Ankle

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Figure #1

## What is it?

- A bunion = Hallux (Big toe) Valgus (to the outside).
- The great toe is deviated to the outside, creating a prominence on the inside of the forefoot (Figure. #1).
- It is important to understand that the “Bump” is part of the big toe joint (the metatarsal head) that is abnormally aligned. It is NOT an extra bone that can simply be shaved-off.
- Bunion deformities can vary greatly in their extent and in the symptoms that they cause.

## What causes bunions?

- Bunions occur gradually over time due to the way each foot absorbs force during walking.
- Most patients with bunions have a family history of bunions
- 1/3 of women in the USA have bunions

## Clinical Presentation:

Bunion Symptoms can vary in severity from none at all to severe discomfort aggravated by restrictive shoe wear and by standing and walking.

- Pain over the prominent bump on the inside of the forefoot. (Figure #2):
  - And/or: Pain under the area near the base of the second toe. (Figure #2):
  - There is NO direct correlation between the size of the bunion and the patient’s symptoms.
  - Symptoms are often exacerbated by restrictive shoe wear, particularly shoes with a narrow toe box or an uncomfortable, stiff, restraining upper.
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## NON-OPERATIVE TREATMENT

Most bunion symptoms can be effectively treated without surgery. Although the bunion deformity cannot be eliminated without surgery excellent resolution of symptoms is usually possible with simple non- operative interventions. Non-operative treatment may include:

- Comfort shoes. Shoes with a wide non-constrictive toe box, especially one that is made out of a soft material such as leather, can be quite helpful in reducing the irritation over the prominent bunion. In some instances, it is helpful to have a shoemaker stretch the inside aspect of the shoe. We commonly recommend Hoka tennis shoes or Birkenstock sandals.
- Bunion pads that cover the painful prominence may also be helpful in decreasing the symptoms associated with the bunion. These pads can be obtained at many drugstores.
- A toe spacer placed between the great toe and the second toe can help to reduce the bunion deformity and, thereby, decrease the bunion symptoms. Calf stretching may also help decrease stress applied to the foot when standing and walking.



**IMAGE:** *Toe space with bunion guard Pedifix Visco-GEL Dual-Action Bunion Fix Toe Protector - Each*

Can purchase on-line at **Medicaleshop.com**

- Over-the-counter accommodative orthotics may also help bunion symptoms. Orthotics with a slight arch built in may be particularly helpful if bunion symptoms are associated with the sole of the forefoot.

## **SURGICAL TREATMENT**

Surgery may be needed if a bunion still hurts despite appropriate non-operative treatment. Patients now go home the same day as the surgery, but full recovery may take 6-12 months.

Please see our post-operative protocol titled **Bunionectomy** for further pre-operative and post-operative protocol.

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