

Toe Deformity / HammerToe / Claw Toe

People often blame the common foot deformity "claw toe" on wearing shoes that squeeze your toes, such as shoes that are too short or high heels. However, claw toe also is often the result of nerve damage caused by diseases like diabetes or alcoholism, which can weaken the muscles in your foot. Having claw toe means your toes "claw," digging down into the soles of your shoes and creating painful calluses. Claw toe gets worse without treatment and may become a permanent deformity over time.

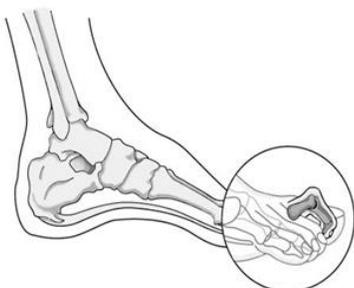
Symptoms

- Your toes are bent upward (extension) from the joints at the ball of the foot.
- Your toes are bent downward (flexion) at the middle joints toward the sole of your shoe.
- Sometimes your toes also bend downward at the top joints, curling under the foot.
- Corns may develop over the top of the toe or under the ball of the foot.



Evaluation

If you have symptoms of a claw toe, see your doctor for evaluation. You may need certain tests to rule out neurological disorders that can weaken your foot muscles, creating imbalances that bend your toes. Trauma and inflammation can also cause claw toe deformity.



Treatment

- Claw toe deformities are usually flexible at first, but they harden into place over time. If you have claw toe in early stages, your doctor may recommend a splint or tape to hold your toes in correct position.
- Wear shoes with soft, roomy toe boxes and avoid tight shoes and high-heels.
- Use your hands to stretch your toes and toe joints toward their normal positions.
- Exercise your toes by using them to pick up marbles or crumple a towel laid flat on the floor.
- You may need a special pad that can redistribute your weight and relieve pressure on the ball of your foot.
- Try special "in depth" shoes that have an extra 3/8" depth in the toe box.
- Ask a shoe repair shop to stretch a small pocket in the toe box to accommodate the deformity.
- If these treatments do not help, you may need surgery to correct the problem.