

“Hammer Time”



When M.C. Hammer sang his now infamous song, he wasn't talking about your feet. But hammertoes, a condition seen frequently in both men and women, are nothing to sing about and can keep those who suffer from the condition from participating in normal activities.

A hammertoe is formed from an abnormal balance of the muscles in the toes. This causes increased pressures on the tendons and joints of the toe, leading to the contracture or bending of the toe at the first joint of the digit, called the proximal interphalangeal joint. This bending causes the toe to appear like an upside-down V when looked at from the side. Any toe can be involved, but the condition usually affects the second through fifth toes, known as the lesser digits.

A visit to your podiatrist can be the first step to relief. The podiatrist will first determine what type of hammertoes you have—either flexible hammertoes, which are less serious because

they can be diagnosed and treated while still in the developmental state, or rigid hammertoes, which are more developed and more serious. Rigid hammertoes can be seen in patients who wait too long to seek professional treatment for example, or in patients with severe arthritis. The tendons in a rigid hammertoe become tight and the joint misaligned and immobile, making surgery the usual course of treatment.

The treatment options vary with the type and severity of each hammertoe, although identifying the deformity early in its development is important to avoid surgery. Your podiatric physician will examine and X-ray the affected area and recommend a treatment plan specific to your condition. Your doctor may recommend

- **Padding and Taping** – Often this is the first step in a treatment plan. Padding the hammertoe prominence minimizes pain and allows you to continue a normal, active life. Taping may change the imbalance around the toes and thus relieve the stress and pain.
- **Medication** – Anti-inflammatory drugs and cortisone injections can be prescribed to ease acute pain and inflammation caused by the joint deformity.
- **Orthotic Devices** – Custom shoe inserts made by your podiatrist may be useful in controlling foot function. An orthotic device may reduce symptoms and prevent the worsening of the hammertoe deformity.

If these treatments are not effective, several surgical procedures are also available to the podiatric physician. For less severe deformities, the surgery will remove the bony prominence and restore normal alignment of the toe joint, thus relieving pain. Severe hammertoes, which are not fully reducible, may require more complex surgical procedures.

Hammertoes are common and don't need to be a pain. Since we all know that our feet aren't supposed to hurt, finding out more about why they do can make us more likely to want to sing—and dance. •

APMA Seal of Acceptance: Your Guide to Great Gifts this Season

The American Podiatric Medical Association's (APMA) Seal of Acceptance/Approval Program recognizes products that have been found beneficial to foot health and of significant value when used in a consistently applied program of daily foot care and regular professional treatment. Some of the best gift choices to consider are listed below. In addition, you may want to check with your podiatrist for his or her recommendations this holiday season.

- **Sole Savior's SOS Safe Salon Pedicure Kit** – Give this great kit to any pedicure enthusiast and you'll ensure their comfort and their safety as well. www.solesavior.com
- **Heaven4Toes' Products** – Make every step a walk in the clouds and enjoy your favorite activities in divine comfort. www.heaven4toes.com
- **Injinji Footwear, Inc.'s Performance Series Tetratsok** – For the athlete on your list, these socks protect, prevent blisters,

and out-perform any ordinary tube closed sport sock. www.injinji.com

- **See Kai Run's toddler footwear** – For baby gifts, these little shoes can't be beat. They come in hip, urban styles and modern color palettes. www.seekairun.com
- **FitFlops** – For vacation or those living in warmer climates, these flip flops are all the rage this year. Get them before they disappear. www.thefitflop.com •



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