

No Bones About It

Summer 2012

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What to do with those ugly bunions

By Zachary C. Leonard, M.D.

Bunions are a significant problem in our society today. In the cold Yooper winters, they remain hidden under wool socks and rubber boots. However, in the recent hot weather that has blanketed the U.P., bunions must be shown off, if only for comfort. Therefore, many are wondering as they look down at their sand covered feet, what should be done?

Before a bunion can be treated, it must be identified. Most people recognize bunions from the bump on the side of the great toe joint. When the big toe has a bump and then deviates laterally, the deformity is called hallux valgus (meaning big toe angled-out). Hallux valgus affects approximately 2-4% of our population and is the most common pathology affecting the big toe. In adults, it occurs at least twice as often in females as males. In the juvenile population, females make up greater than 85% of the patients.

Why are females so prone to bunions? Well, there are many factors that contribute to hallux valgus. Shoes have been cited as a cause of bunions, especially those cute, high heels with the narrow toe-box. However, all shoes play a role as barefoot populations have much lower rates of bunions (although females have higher rates even in these populations). Likely the predominant overall factor is a genetic predisposition. That's right, usually you can look and blame mom or grandma! In some studies, up to 80% of bunion patients report mothers with the deformity. A strong

familial linkage, female preponderance, and often bilateral involvement, all support a genetic etiology. With that said, many men do suffer from hallux valgus and thus bunions should not be thought of as only a female problem.

Now, what should be done about these ugly bunions? First and foremost, it should be to determine if the bunions are painful or not. Non-painful bunions, although often cosmetically unappealing, do not require treatment. Many bunions do eventually lead patients to seek medical care because of significant foot pain. Initial treatment should focus on footwear modification. Shoes with wide toe box, low heeled, and stretchable material eliminate pressure over the bunion. Women with bunions can often do this by shopping in the men's athletic shoes department.

When should surgery be considered? Only in patients with pain, and only when conservative measures have failed. Surgical corrective procedures are numerous for bunions and the specific procedure depends on the severity of the hallux valgus deformity. Recovery varies post-operatively depending on the procedure done. Bunion surgery should never be taken lightly. Complications (although rare) can include recurrence of the deformity, a tender scar, and decreased motion of the big toe among other possibilities associated with surgery. Despite these possible complications, patients are generally pleased with the results of surgical correction. For now, let your feet breathe in a comfy pair of flip flops and enjoy the summer.

Appointment with Dr. Leonard can be made by calling 906-225-1321



Shoes

By Cathy Ruprecht, MSPT

Shoe design and technology change often. Having a better understanding of the type of foot you have and the type of shoe you are looking for is important to make you a smarter shoe consumer. Other than being fashionably cute, shoes do much to enhance the health of our feet, legs and back. Putting your foot into the wrong shoe can have significant impact on your joint and tendon structures causing painful conditions, such as pain under the arch of your foot, forefoot and heel. According to "Fit Facts: Sneaker Savvy" by the American Council on Exercise dated, 2009 consulting with an athletic shoe store with a good reputation is important in making the right shoe selection. Ask questions about shoe structure for your type of foot.

The following tips can also be helpful:

- *Look for shoes near the end of the day when your feet are more swollen.*
- *Wear socks of thickness for your activity for which you are choosing the shoes.*
- *Look for a shoe with a large enough toe box to avoid cramping or rubbing on your toes and allow space for toes to wiggle.*
- *Choose a size shoe to allow a space of the width of your index finger between the end of the shoe and your longest toe.*
- *Remember the shock absorbing foot bed on which you stand and do your activity compresses over time and loses shock absorptive benefit.*
- *Shoes need to be replaced after 3 months to one year depending on your body weight and the number of hours you are in the shoes.*
- *Also, if you have a job which requires prolonged standing, consider having a spare pair of shoes you can switch to during the day. This will give you a fresh absorptive foot bed to stand on and may help reduce leg and foot fatigue.*
- *Shoe styles change frequently. If you find a pair of shoes you love, consider buying several pairs to keep on hand as replacements when needed.*

Shoes should not have to go through a break in period. They should be comfortable, but consult with the shoe store to find out about their ability to help you stretch or modify a shoe that begins to rub. Also, inquire about the return policy if the shoe does not work for you over time.

Choose a shoe appropriate for the activity. If you have a job requiring prolonged standing, ask about shoes designed for this purpose. Shoes made for walking and running have different demands and therefore different structural design.

Finding the right shoe for your foot can make you feel like Cinderella. If you love your shoe and hate to take it off at night, you are probably in the right shoe. If you can't wait to get home and kick off your shoes, you probably don't have the right shoe. Take the time to find the right shoes to enjoy healthy and happy feet.

Business Corner

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Areas of Specialty: Highlights of all our areas of specialty, including: Shoulder & Elbow, Hand & Wrist, Spine & Non-Surgical Spine, Hip & Knee, Foot & Ankle, Sports Medicine, Total Joint Replacement & Revision, Trauma, Plastic & Reconstructive, Physical Therapy, Digital X-Ray, Bone Density Studies, and Body Composition Scan. Also, contains a View Medica library of interactive videos on specific orthopaedic conditions and procedures.

Patient Resources: Includes information on making an appointment (online requests available), patient forms, patient education, interactive patient education, insurance information, frequently asked questions, patient testimonials (stories and videos of actual patients), online bill pay, and information regarding Maquette General Hospital's Total Joint Program.

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