

## Warning: It's going to get Corny

Longing for smooth, baby-soft feet? Can't seem to find a way to get rid of those pesky hardened skin known as corns and calluses? *HealthToday* talks to a podiatrist to find out ways to eliminate corns and calluses safely, and for good. WORDS **HANNAH MAY-LEE WONG**



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### What are corns and calluses?

Corns normally come together with calluses. They are thick, hardened layers of skin that develop on the bottom of our feet. The difference between the two is that calluses grow on the outer layer of our skin, while corns grow inwards, and inside our skin.

### What are the causes?

Basically, corns and calluses form when your skin tries to protect itself against friction and pressure. Thus, corns and calluses tend to appear on the pressure points of a foot, and it could be worsened by wearing ill-fitting shoes. Each person's pressure points are unique, therefore, the position of where corns and calluses develop differs from person to person.

A podiatrist would be able to tell you why you are developing corns in certain areas by observing the way you walk. The risk of developing corns depends of a person's foot type and joint mobility. Those who have existing foot deformities are also at higher risk of developing corns and calluses.



### How are corns different from warts?

Warts usually do not grow at the pressure points of your feet. But if they do grow in those areas, it can be quite hard to differentiate corns from warts. Even podiatrists might have to do some debridement (removal of dead skin) before we can tell if it is a corn or a wart. That said, corns and warts are completely different things. Warts are caused by viruses of the human papillomavirus (HPV) family, and if you debride a wart, sometimes you will see black dots and/or some pinpoint bleeding.

Warts are removed by salicylic acid or special medicated plasters available in the pharmacy. Warts can be very stubborn, and everybody responds differently to treatment. Some people can get rid of their warts easily with the creams and plasters widely available in pharmacies. But others may need to see a dermatologist who would prescribe something stronger like cryotherapy.

Podiatrists need to make sure we get the right diagnosis from the beginning. "Corn and wart removal creams" are not a long-term treatment for corns. These creams contain salicylic acid that would just make the skin soft and cause the whole area to peel and drop off—the corn would fall off, too. However, most times, the corn will grow back because the heart of the matter is, there is repeated pressure and friction going on in the same area that needs to be eased.





## How can we remove corns and calluses?

If you have corns, you should see a podiatrist or doctor to have it removed. A podiatrist will use a scalpel or blade to de-nucleate the corn and scrape it out. Don't worry, it is usually not a painful process — it's a bit like going to a pedicurist. Since corns are caused by prolonged friction and pressure in the same area, it is likely to grow back again after removal. If a patient's corns grow back quickly after being removed, a podiatrist will prescribe orthotics, which are custom-made padded shoe inserts, to help relieve pressure at certain points of the foot.

If you are healthy, not diabetic and have no vascular issues (any abnormal condition of the blood vessels), you can file your calluses at home using a nail file or an emery board.



## What are the possible complications?

If you are healthy and don't have diabetes, developing corns and calluses is not a big issue because if it turns harmful, the area would hurt, and it alarms you to do something about it.

Conversely, corns and calluses on a person with diabetes can lead to ulcers and this is not to be taken lightly. Nerve damage from diabetes can lead to the loss of sensation in the feet. In this group of people, they do not feel pain even when the corn continues to rub. In the end, the corn breaks off, damaging the tissue around it and becomes an ulcer which can become infected. If you have diabetes or any vascular issues that cause poor blood flow to your feet, seek the advice of your doctor for proper foot care and management of corns and calluses.



## How can we best prevent corns and calluses?

The best way is to reduce repeated pressure and friction in the same area of your foot. This often means wearing shoes that fit you well, have plenty of support and have room to wiggle your toes — sport shoes are a good option. Wearing socks also protects your feet and reduces friction.

Another great option is to get a pair of prescription foot orthotics from a podiatrist. Lastly, you may want to purchase protective pads or coverings over areas on your feet that tend to rub. **HT**

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Reference: Mayo Clinic. Corns and calluses. Retrieved from: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/corns-and-calluses/symptoms-causes/syc-20355946>.