

Corns and Calluses

Corns are small areas of thickened, often hardened skin with a central core found in the feet. They are usually found on the knuckles of the toes and, in particular, on the side of the little toe. Hard corns are usually found on the upper surface of the toes, those found between the toes are termed soft corns. They are the body's normal response to pressure and friction and are generally caused by badly fitting footwear either shoes of the wrong size or made from hard material, or with pointed toes or very high heels.

While corns can be removed by careful treatment, they will return if the cause is not removed. Soaking corns in warm water may soften them sufficiently to allow removal using a pumice stone or emery board. This should always be done gently, for a number of days.

Corn removing treatments usually contain salicylic acid which itself softens the hard skin of a corn to allow its removal by gentle scraping. Care should be taken with its use, however. Salicylic acid should only be applied to the corn; it may burn healthy skin. Felt rings are often used to protect the corn and ease the pressure of footwear.

Diabetics should not use over the counter corn treatments. One of the side-effects of diabetes is poor circulation in the extremities. A less than adequate blood supply means poor recovery of damage and a lack of sensitivity, making the application of skin-dissolving substances like salicylic acid potentially very damaging. Diabetics should go to a chiropodist for regular foot check-ups and treatment of foot problems. The elderly with poor circulation and people with persistent corns should also be referred to a chiropodist.

Calluses are more extensive patches of toughened skin that can occur on any part of the body, especially hands, feet or knees, that endure repeated pressure or irritation. Treatment is the same as for corns.

Many products contain salicylates which may affect those sensitive to salicylates including aspirin, such as asthmatics.