



HEALTH & FITNESS • 9

## Weekend Doctor

By DR. THOMAS F. VAIL

Fall is often a painful time for many women.

As women transition from open-toed sandals to closed-in boots and shoes, more of them seek relief for painful bunions.

This trend plays out every fall. Some female bunion patients are in agony and describe a constant, throbbing pain, even when they take their shoes off.

A bunion is a bone deformity caused by an enlargement of the joint at the base and side of the big toe.

Bunions form when the toe moves out of place. The enlargement then causes more irritation or swelling.

In some cases, the big toe moves toward the second toe and rotates or twists. Bunions can also lead to other toe deformities, such as hammertoe.

It is estimated that 33 percent of the population in Western countries suffer from bunions.

Bunions are often inherited and tend to run in families, usually because of a faulty foot structure.

Foot injuries, neuromuscular problems, flat feet and pronated feet can also contribute to their formation.

Wearing shoes that are too tight can aggravate bunions, as many women with bunions suffer from discomfort and pain from the constant irritation, rubbing and friction of the enlargement against shoes.

The skin over the toe becomes red and tender, and because this joint flexes with every step, the bigger the bunion gets, the more it hurts to walk.

Over time, bursitis or arthritis may set in, the skin on the bottom of the foot may become thicker, and walking may become difficult, all contributing to chronic pain.

Some women ask about bunion surgery in the fall because they're less busy than in the summer months. Also, many are closer to meeting their insurance deductibles.

Surgery is a last resort treatment for painful bunions. In many cases, simple changes like wearing shoes with wider toe boxes can reduce bunion pain.

Custom shoe inserts, gel- or foam-filled padding and anti-inflammatory medications may also provide pain relief.

When the pain of a bunion interferes with a woman's daily activities, then it's time to discuss surgical options.

Depending on the size of the enlargement, misalignment of the toe, and level of pain, different surgery techniques may be advised to remove the bunion and realign the toe.

The sooner you see your podiatrist to discuss treatment options, the sooner you'll be on the road to enjoying life's activities again.



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