



The Three C's - Corns, Calluses and Cracked Heels

Corns and calluses are two of the most common podiatry complaints and both are caused by pressure and rubbing. The pressure can result from walking or running and can give rise to an area of thickened skin (callus), particularly on the sole of the foot, but also on the heel and when it becomes too thick it will cause discomfort to the tissue beneath and cracks in the skin may occur. A podiatrist can quickly remove the surplus skin to give instant relief. Regular moisturising and the use of a pumice stone or file will keep the skin soft, reducing the build up of callus to make the feet feel more comfortable.

A corn is a small, round, concentrated area of callus and is typically found on areas of the foot where friction is intense due to a bone of the foot pressing against the shoe. Hard corns are frequently found on the top of smaller toes or on the outer edge of the little toe, which are typically the areas where badly fitting shoes will rub. Soft corns are white and rubbery and usually form between the toes, where the skin is moist. Seed corns are tiny and form on the bottom of the foot, either in groups or individually. Corns which have been present for a long time may be more deeply attached and often quite painful. A podiatrist will treat all types of corn in a similar way; the hardened skin is gently removed, followed by the excision of the nucleus. Padding is supplied, if necessary, to the area around the corn to relieve pressure, as it may initially be tender and to prevent further rubbing. It is important that diabetics and the elderly do not try to treat corns themselves, as some vascular corns will bleed. It is not recommended that patients use corn plasters or paints, as they can burn the surrounding skin if not applied correctly, causing further discomfort and possibly even ulcers.

Cracked, discoloured heels occur when the skin around the heel becomes so dry that it splits, causing cracks (fissures), which can be painful when walking and will bleed if they become deep. A podiatrist will remove the dry skin and apply a deep moisturiser to soften the heel and aid healing.

The best way to try and avoid corns, calluses and cracked heels is to wear soft, comfortable, well-fitting shoes. When necessary, gently file the areas where hard skin builds up and moisturise the feet every day. Sometimes uneven pressure upon the foot is inevitable due to postural malalignment, certain foot or limb conditions, or if you have bony protrusions that push against your shoe. In these circumstances it is quite likely that calluses and corns will recur, but regular podiatry care will keep the discomfort to a minimum or, if appropriate, the podiatrist may design an insole to be placed in the shoe to redistribute the pressure.

Next month – everything you ever wanted to know about verrucas!

Sarah Turner BSc.(Hons), MChS.
Registered Podiatrist

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