

Callus and corns

A patient's guide to self-caring

What causes hard skin and corns?

Callus is an extended area of thickened, hard skin on the soles of the feet caused by increased pressure on an area of skin. This can be from standing, footwear rubbing or internal structures such as a prominent bone. Some people have a natural tendency to form callus because of their skin type. Callus or hard skin is very common in elderly feet due to the reduced amounts of fatty tissue under their skin, leading to increased formation of callus on the balls of the feet.

Corns are again caused by pressure or friction over an area of skin, but they have a central core. Corns can be painful. There are five different types of corns, the most common of which are 'hard' and 'soft' corns:

- **Hard corns** – these are the most common and appear as a small area of concentrated hard skin.
- **Soft corns** – these develop in a similar way to hard corns but they are whitish and rubbery in texture and appear between toes where the skin is moist from sweat or from inadequate drying.
- **Seed corns** – these are tiny corns that tend to occur when the skin is very dry on the bottom of the foot and are usually painless.
- **Vascular/neurovascular corns** – these are corns that have both nerve fibres and blood vessels in them. They can be very painful and can bleed if cut.
- **Fibrous corns** – these arise when corns have been present for a long time and are more firmly attached to the deeper tissues than any other type of corn.



What can I do to treat my callus/ corns?

Do not attempt to remove corns yourself using anything sharp as this can lead to tissue damage, cause bleeding and increase the risk of developing an infection.

It is also not advised to use over the counter corn treatments or corn plasters that contain acid without seeking guidance from a health care professional. The acid in these products can damage the healthy skin around the corn or callus, again increasing the risk of pain, developing a wound or developing an infection. You should never use these products if you have diabetes, vascular disease or poor circulation or have any illness or take any medication that will mean you are slower to heal.

Using a pumice stone or foot file regularly to gently remove hard skin build up and apply a foot cream (not body lotion or oil) will help prevent the build up of hard skin / corns and help keep you pain free. The filing should be in gentle circular motions. You should not continue if the area becomes red, irritated or fragile.

Choosing shoes that fit correctly is the easiest way to reduce the pressure on your skin. Shoes should be deep and wide enough that they do not touch the tops of your toes or feel tight along the borders of your foot, even if the area is soft, as rubbing can cause callus and corns to form. If you need help picking 'good shoes', please see our footwear advice leaflet.

If you have tried to care for your corns or callus and still think you need some help, see a podiatrist. You can ask your GP or Health care professional to refer you to the podiatry team or you can complete a self-referral form.

If you have no medical need for this service, for example, the areas are not painful or you are able to self-care well, you may not qualify for care under the NHS. Should this be the case, the Society of Chiropodists and podiatrist can point you in the direction of registered podiatrists in your local area.

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please contact us on 020 7288 3182. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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