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HAMMERTOES

HAMMERTOE IS A FOOT CONDITION WHERE A TOE (USUALLY THE SECOND TOE) BENDS DOWNWARD AT THE MIDDLE JOINT, RESEMBLING A HAMMER. IT'S OFTEN CAUSED BY WEARING SHOES THAT CROWD THE TOES, BUT CAN ALSO RESULT FROM INJURIES OR MUSCLE IMBALANCES. TREATMENT OPTIONS RANGE FROM CONSERVATIVE MEASURES LIKE SHOE MODIFICATIONS AND EXERCISES TO SURGICAL CORRECTION FOR SEVERE CASES.

CAUSES:

IMPROPER FOOTWEAR:

- SHOES THAT ARE TOO TIGHT, NARROW, OR HAVE HIGH HEELS CAN FORCE THE TOES INTO A BENT POSITION, LEADING TO HAMMERTOE.

FOOT INJURIES:

- STUBBING, JAMMING, OR BREAKING A TOE CAN INCREASE THE RISK OF HAMMERTOE DEVELOPMENT.

MUSCLE OR TENDON IMBALANCES:

- IMBALANCES IN THE MUSCLES AND TENDONS OF THE FOOT CAN CAUSE THE TOES TO BEND ABNORMALLY.

UNDERLYING CONDITIONS:

- ARTHRITIS AND NERVE DAMAGE CAN ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO HAMMERTOE.

SYMPTOMS:

- PAIN OR STIFFNESS IN THE AFFECTED TOE.
- CORNS OR CALLUSES ON THE TOP OF THE BENT TOE OR ON THE BALL OF THE FOOT.
- DIFFICULTY OR PAIN WHEN MOVING THE TOE.
- VISIBLE BEND IN THE TOE JOINT.

TREATMENT:

NON-SURGICAL:

- PROPER FOOTWEAR: WEARING SHOES WITH A WIDER TOE BOX AND LOWER HEELS CAN HELP ALLEVIATE PRESSURE ON THE TOES.
- TOE EXERCISES: GENTLE STRETCHING AND STRENGTHENING EXERCISES CAN IMPROVE FLEXIBILITY AND STRENGTHEN THE MUSCLES IN THE FOOT.
- ORTHOTICS: CUSTOM OR OVER-THE-COUNTER SHOE INSERTS CAN HELP REDISTRIBUTE PRESSURE AND SUPPORT THE FOOT.
- PADDING AND TAPING: PADDING CAN PROTECT THE AFFECTED TOE FROM RUBBING AND PRESSURE, WHILE TAPING CAN HELP STRAIGHTEN THE TOE.

SURGICAL:

- SURGERY MAY BE CONSIDERED IF NON-SURGICAL TREATMENTS ARE INEFFECTIVE OR IF THE HAMMERTOE IS RIGID AND PAINFUL. SURGICAL OPTIONS INCLUDE:
- TENDON RELEASE: CUTTING OR LENGTHENING THE TENDONS TO STRAIGHTEN THE TOE.
- JOINT RESECTION: REMOVING A PORTION OF THE BONE IN THE AFFECTED JOINT.
- JOINT FUSION: FUSING THE BONES OF THE JOINT TO STABILIZE IT.

PREVENTION:

- WEAR SHOES THAT FIT PROPERLY AND PROVIDE ENOUGH ROOM FOR THE TOES.
- AVOID WEARING HIGH HEELS OR SHOES WITH NARROW TOE BOXES FOR EXTENDED PERIODS.
- STRETCH AND STRENGTHEN YOUR FEET REGULARLY.
- SEEK PROMPT TREATMENT FOR ANY FOOT INJURIES.