Corns between the toes ? Ouch! [1]

Dearest Alice,

I found this address and was ecstatic. My friends and I were surfing in English class and found this very interesting column. I would like to ask you about corns between the toes. My cousin has these monumental corns which have kept her from her job. Although my cousin and I are not really close, I'm sure she would be happy to accept your advice. I hope you will answer my question.

Thank you.

Corny

Answer

Dear Corny,

First, welcome to Go Ask Alice! Stay, get comfortable, and, above all, learn something. Secondly, getting to the meat and potatoes of your question (with a side of corn, of course — got to have those veggies [2]), the following paragraphs will discuss causes, treatments and prevention of your troublesome toes.

**Causes:** Sometimes confused with calluses, these often painful little sTOE-aways that your cousin is experiencing are usually caused by ill-fitting shoes. The rubbing that results from shoes that are too tight or too loose may cause skin to thicken and become inflamed at the pressure points such as on top of the toes or the sides of the feet, leaving the "little piggies" in distress. Pain can range from slight throbbing on and around the inflamed area to much more severe discomfort like in your cousin's case.

Corns between the toes, also known as soft corns, are some of the more painful kinds. They are caused by the combination of tight-fitting shoes and moisture between the toes. They are sometimes also the result of bone spurs. They are also more prone to infection than the top-of-the-toe kind, so they may require a little extra attention.

**Treatments:** Most corns will disappear on their own once the friction that caused them has ceased. This could mean sacrificing those sassy sky-high heels for a while or wearing well-fitting socks with those shoes that may be rubbing you the wrong way. But beauty is pain, right? Not necessarily: corn pads can be a useful remedy for the corns on the tops and sides of feet, though not for between the toes. Instead, for soft corns, your cousin can reduce the
risk of infection by cleaning in between her toes with antibacterial soap and then drying them thoroughly. She may want to purchase some lamb's wool from her local drug store in the foot care aisle. For some extra padding, pull off a small piece of lamb's wool, roll into a toe-shaped ball, and insert between the two affected toes to separate them and prevent friction. The lamb's wool should be changed at least once daily to prevent infection. Lamb's wool is recommended over cotton to cushion the toes. Cotton may stick to the soft corn. She may also want to consider visiting a shoe shop to have her favorite pairs stretched a bit to prevent rubbing.

If these quick fixes don't do the trick and pain persists, a health care provider can usually treat soft corns during an office visit.

Prevention: Of course, the best way to avoid painful corns is to prevent them in the first place. When buying shoes, test to make sure you are able to wiggle your toes comfortably (this is a sign that your shoes fit properly in the toe box) and look for kicks with ample padding. If you still notice rubbing, wear adhesive bandages or insert padding to buffer the problem areas. In the event that your cousins' toe woes are caused by an underlying foot deformity, a podiatrist can fit her for special inserts (orthotics) that may help alleviate the pain and prevent the development of future corns.

With an eye on prevention and treatment, hopefully your cousin's little piggies will be singing a happier tune.

Alice!

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