



GARNET ORTHOPEDIC
SOLUTIONS



PATIENT EDUCATION GUIDE

Understanding Hallux Valgus and Protecting Your Big Toe Joint

A practical guide to why bunions form, what puts you at risk, and how a personalized plan can ease pain, slow progression, and keep you comfortable on your feet.

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SECTION 01

What Is Hallux Valgus?

Hallux valgus, commonly known as a bunion, occurs when the joint of the big toe moves out of alignment. The joint typically deviates toward the outside of the foot while the toe itself angles the opposite way, toward the smaller toes. As a result, a visible bump forms at the joint.

The development of hallux valgus is thought to be multifactorial, arising from environmental factors like poor-fitting footwear, structural factors such as hereditary predisposition or excessive pronation, or a combination of the two.

SECTION 02

Recognizing the Symptoms

Hallux valgus affects each person individually. Some experience real pain and discomfort; others notice structural changes with little pain at all. Early symptoms can include:

- Joint stiffness
- Joint swelling
- Redness
- Joint pain
- Development of a bump over the big toe joint

SECTION 03

How Symptoms Progress Over Time

Left unaddressed, hallux valgus tends to broaden its effects well beyond the big toe joint itself. As the condition advances, people often notice:

- Ongoing joint pain
- Structural deformity of the big toe
- Structural deformity of the second toe, as the first toe deviates and crosses over it, sometimes leading to a hammer toe, corns, blisters, or additional pain
- Decreased balance and an increased risk of falls
- Slower walking speed
- Difficulty walking across uneven surfaces
- Muscle weakness

- Decreased joint range of motion
- Increased pressure under the ball of the big toe
- Difficulty ascending or descending stairs

In elderly patients, hallux valgus has been associated with a less stable gait pattern overall, including decreased walking speed and shorter stride length over uneven surfaces.

SECTION 04

Risk Factors Worth Knowing

Hallux valgus can affect anyone, but it's more prevalent with certain risk factors:

- Age: the chance of developing hallux valgus increases as you get older
- Sex: studies suggest it's more prevalent in females, possibly linked to frequent high-heeled shoe use
- Joint injury: repetitive or traumatic injuries to the big toe joint may increase the likelihood of developing it
- Activities: exercise or occupations that place added stress on the big toe joint, including ballet or gymnastics, can bring on the deformity



Frequent high-heeled or narrow footwear is one of the more modifiable risk factors for hallux valgus.

Because hallux valgus can have a multifactorial onset, especially with a family history, avoiding it altogether can be difficult. You can help reduce symptoms by avoiding some of the aggravating factors: ill-fitting footwear, high-impact exercise, excessive weight gain, and activities that reliably increase your pain. Giving an injury adequate rehab time before returning to sport also helps.

If your footwear or mechanics might be contributing to your symptoms, an assessment can confirm it and point to the right fix.

[Book an Assessment](#)

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SECTION 05

Staying Active With Pain

Conservative treatments, including custom orthoses and changes to your current footwear, play a key role in staying active while managing hallux valgus. While it's important to stay active, limiting yourself to movements that aren't painful, or that are less intensive, will generally provide the most symptom relief.



Low-impact activity on forgiving surfaces is often more comfortable than high-impact exercise while symptoms settle.

Make sure your footwear suits your activity; the wrong choice can work against your exercise routine without you even realizing it. Listen to your body, allow ample rest, and check in with your physician, physiotherapist, or kinesiologist before starting a new exercise program or if you have questions about your fitness plan.

SECTION 06

Your Treatment Options

Treatment goals for hallux valgus center on managing pain and symptoms while keeping you able to complete daily activities with as much function and mobility as possible. Early intervention matters here, since it may provide greater joint stability, slow the progression of the deformity, and help maintain your quality of life.

Conservative treatment options include:

- Custom foot orthoses
- Cushioning, such as off-the-shelf pads and toe sleeves
- Accommodative footwear
- A bunion night splint
- Physiotherapy and stretching
- Medications

- Injections

In severe cases, surgery may become necessary, but this should only be considered after conservative options have been exhausted without meaningful relief. Dietitians, kinesiologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and foot care nurses or chiropodists may all play a role in your broader symptom and exercise management.

SECTION 07

Footwear Recommendations

Your footwear choices are an integral part of your treatment plan and your day-to-day comfort. Look for cushioning and support, extra depth through the forefoot, a stiff heel counter, and a proper overall fit. A stiff rocker toe can also help by reducing the effort needed to push off at the end of your walking stride.

A few other features worth looking for:

- A wide, deep toe box to accommodate toe deformities
- Seamless construction through the upper shoe, which limits pressure on or around the big toe joint
- Laces or buckles, which generally provide a better fit than slip-on styles
- Avoiding heeled shoes as much as possible

Your pedorthist can recommend shoe choices suited to your work and activity needs, and in some cases can stretch or modify your existing shoes for more comfort, especially around the first toe.

SECTION 08

Custom Orthotics vs. Off-the-Shelf

Custom foot orthoses are made from a mold, or cast, of your own foot. Your pedorthist takes that cast in a specific position and selects materials and construction details tailored specifically to you. Evidence suggests custom orthoses can be a viable part of your treatment plan, easing pain and discomfort while supporting movement function.

Off-the-shelf devices are pre-fabricated for an "average" foot and designed to slip into most footwear; some are heat-moldable for a degree of customization, but none are made specifically for your foot. In the early stages of hallux valgus, an OTS device may be perfectly appropriate for pain management. As the condition progresses, though, a custom orthotic is typically better suited to your overall needs.

OFF-THE-SHELF ORTHOTICS		CUSTOM ORTHOTICS
Cost	Cheaper upfront	Often partly covered by extended health benefits
Availability	Instant, off a shelf	Made for you, ready in a matter of days
Fit	Generic size range	Molded from a cast of your exact foot
What it does	Offers general cushioning	Slows progression and eases pressure at the joint
Lifespan	Wears out, replace often	Built to last, and adjustable as your condition changes

Curious whether custom orthotics could help slow your progression?

[See Custom Orthotics](#)

SECTION 09

What to Expect at Garnet

Your Garnet pedorthist creates an individualized treatment plan suited to your specific needs, goals, and symptoms, addressing both your current concerns and future prevention. At your initial appointment, we complete a thorough foot examination, and a follow-up exam ensures your plan is meeting your goals so it can be reassessed as needed. During these appointments, we typically:

- Assess joint and muscle function, including range of motion and gait
- Assess your footwear for both fit and function
- Identify modifiable risk factors and recommend changes
- Identify areas of risk using specialized tools such as pressure mapping
- Discuss a treatment plan, which may include a footwear change, activity modification, custom foot orthoses, or a referral for complementary treatment

Want to understand what a gait analysis actually involves before you book?

[Learn About Gait Analysis](#)

[Book Now](#)

SECTION 10

Prevention and Long-Term Joint Health

Because hallux valgus often has a multifactorial or hereditary onset, true prevention can be difficult. What the evidence supports is a set of habits that can meaningfully slow its progression and reduce your reliance on surgery down the line:

- Choose footwear with a wide, deep toe box and avoid heeled shoes where possible
- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Give injuries proper time to rehabilitate before returning to sport or activity
- Use a bunion night splint in the early stages if your pedorthist recommends one
- Use custom foot orthoses where your assessment shows they would help

Reduce progression, and prolong surgery as much as possible.

Ready to talk to a pedorthist?

Book a consultation and get a treatment plan built around your specific mechanics, gait, and goals.

[Book an Appointment](#)

Garnet Orthopedic Solutions provides pedorthic assessment, custom orthotics, and footwear guidance built around each patient's specific anatomy and goals, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. Our clinic combines hands-on biomechanical assessment with practical, evidence-informed treatment, so patients leave with a plan they understand and can actually follow.

Jeff Lewis, C. Ped (C)

Canadian Certified Pedorthist

Jeff leads patient assessment and custom orthotic care at Garnet Orthopedic Solutions, working with patients to identify the root cause of their foot and lower limb pain and to build a treatment plan suited to their specific needs, goals, and symptoms.

garnetsolutions.ca | This guide is intended for general education and does not replace an individual assessment. Please consult your pedorthist or physician about your specific symptoms.

Appendix: Image Sources

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#	DESCRIPTION	PHOTOGRAPHER	SOURCE
1	Cover — woman selecting shoes in a boutique	Alexandra Maria	pexels.com/photo/318236
2	Sec. 4 — woman walking city street in high heels	Ibrahima Bro Niang	pexels.com/photo/18169535
3	Sec. 5 — woman walking barefoot on the beach	Yan Krukau	pexels.com/photo/5215401

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