

## **BUNION**

A *bunion* is a prominence over the inside part of the foot where the big toe joins the rest of the foot. Pressure on the prominence from shoes causes pain and swelling due to inflammation. The bunion occurs when the foot bone connecting to the big toe (the first metatarsal) moves gradually towards the opposite foot. This is called *hallux valgus*\* deformity. This leads to the big toe being pushed towards the second toe (away from the opposite foot) so that the big toe points away from the other foot.

Other problems can develop with a bunion. For example the second toe may overlap the big toe causing a cross-over toe deformity. With shoe pressure, corns and calluses develop.

### **What is the cause?**

There is no single cause of hallux valgus\* (see above). It most commonly runs in families but may skip generations. High heel, pointed toe shoes are not the primary cause of the hallux valgus but they do cause it to be painful. Pressure from shoes may cause bunions, corns and calluses to develop where there is hallux valgus deformity.

### **Treatment**

Before treatment of a painful bunion can begin, medical evaluation is needed. There are a number of other causes of pain in the big toe such as osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, infection and gout. Circulatory problems not only cause pain, but may also cause serious complications if surgery is attempted. Diabetes and cigarette smoking may diminish healing potential and increase the risk of infection.

Treatment may be surgical or non-surgical. The goal of non-surgical treatment is to relieve pressure on the foot and to prevent pressure sores and foot ulcers. This is accomplished by prescribing accommodative shoes with a wide toe box - sandals or extra depth shoes with soft moulded insoles. It may also be possible to relax the leather on shoes to make room for a bunion.

Surgery can correct painful bunions. The severity of the bunion deformity and the presence of any associated problems (for example painful arthritis) will determine the type of surgery that is recommended. X-rays are necessary to help plan for surgery. Dr Lam discusses the specific surgery in detail at the time of consultation.