Is It a Bunion or Gout?

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Gout vs. Bunion: Identifying the Difference

Bunions are one of the most common foot conditions that affect adults in the U.S., Canada and many other countries around the world. This condition is characterized by a painful enlargement of the big toe joint caused by the bone (first metatarsal) shifting to the inside, while your big toe drifts to the outside. Sometimes, gout may be mistaken for a bunion. So, when it comes to gout vs. bunion, how can people tell the difference? Let’s find out.

Why You May Not Want to Assume It’s a Bunion

Yes, bunions are as painful as they sound. The big toe joint is tasked with carrying much of our weight as we move around, which is why it becomes so painful when a bunion is left untreated. The joint eventually gets stiff and tender and makes wearing shoes painful and even unbearable.

The problem with bunions being such a common foot condition is that people will automatically assume they have a bunion. The reality is that bunions share many of the same symptoms found in other foot conditions like osteoarthritis, bursitis and our main nemesis gout.

Despite their similarities, different causes of foot pain may require different treatments and medical responses. Assuming you have one condition may stop you from getting treatment you need.

Unfortunately, serious conditions like gout only get worse over time without the proper treatment. So, while bunions are in fact a common condition, they are commonly misunderstood. The good news is that we are here to clear up the misconceptions about gout vs. bunion. We’ll also emphasize the importance of seeking treatment as early as possible. Let’s go!

What Exactly Are Bunions?

Bunions get their strange name from the Latin word “bunio,” which means enlargement. We mention it is strange because bunions almost sound like they are a cute thing.

In fact, bunions can sometimes develop on the outside of the foot, along the little toe, and are known as "bunionettes" or "Tailor's bunions." However, people who suffer from bunions do not find them cute at all and can suffer from a great deal of pain and discomfort.

The fact that bunions form at such a critical junction of the bones, tendons and ligaments means that they can seriously impair foot function. That’s not all — the consistent pressure of the big toe may cause other toes to bend and/or develop corns, forming hammertoes.

Symptoms of Bunions

- **Pain in the big toe area:** Bunions can cause intermittent or persistent joint pain in the big toe.
- **Large bump/bony mass:** Bunions are distinguished by a protruding bony mass on the outside of your big toe's base.
- **Swelling/tenderness:** The area around your big toe joint will be red, painful and swollen in most cases.
- **Corns and calluses:** These can form where the first and second toes meet.
- **Stiffness/limited movement:** It's possible that moving your big toe will become difficult or uncomfortable.

What Causes Bunions to Form?

A bunion is a lump on the base of your big toe's joint. If your big toe rubs against your second toe, it might cause your big toe's joint to expand and protrude, resulting in a bunion.

There are many potential factors that can contribute to the development of a bunion, but opinions from the medical community can vary. Nevertheless, bunions can be inherited through the family genes, caused by injuries, or it could be a congenital deformity.

In addition, jobs that require employees to be standing or moving around for significant portions of the day tend to be a big factor. Footwear, especially high-heels and tight-fitting shoes, are also part of the usual suspects.

Treatment Options for Bunions

The short answer to treating bunions is to wear the right shoes when possible. Jobs that require being active on your feet for hours at a time are not a good fit for wearing high heels. Likewise,
wearing shoes that are wider and have a flexible sole to provide adequate cushioning is essential.

Warm soaks, ice packs and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines, like aspirin or ibuprofen, may assist when the bunion is inflamed and uncomfortable.

Surgery is also an option. By removing the bony protuberance and realigning the joint, the goal of surgery is to reduce discomfort and restore normal function (including ligaments, tendons and nerves). Although there are over 100 surgical methods for bunion repair, only a few have been examined or compared in controlled trials.

How Gout Differs From Bunions

When it comes to gout vs. bunion, one of the key differences is that gout is a type of inflammatory arthritis in which high uric acid levels in the blood cause the formation of extremely painful urate crystals in the joint. It is frequently misdiagnosed as a bunion because of the red, painful swelling around the big toe joint

The discomfort of gout is more severe, but generally, it can be difficult to distinguish between the two illnesses. Gout can affect any joint, although the big toe is most affected. Gout symptoms, including pain, inflammation and redness, might be mistaken for a painful bunion.

When comparing gout vs. bunion, bunions develop over time and cause discomfort gradually, gout frequently causes sudden and acute sensations. Gout is most typically linked with discomfort in the big toe joints, but it can affect other parts of the body as well.

Symptoms of Gout

- **Acute/sharp-stabbing joint pain:** Although gout commonly affects your big toe joint, it can also affect other joints.
- **Swelling/tenderness/redness:** When you have gout, your joint will often show swelling, redness, soreness and warmth, which are all indicators of inflammation.
- **Limited movement:** Moving your joints normally can become difficult as gout progresses.

What Causes Gout to Form?

Gout can be caused by a combination of inherited and lifestyle factors. Some people may have trouble naturally breaking down uric acid. A bad diet, on the other hand, might cause uric acid levels to grow in the body.

Gout is more likely to develop in people who have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or are overweight. Worst of all, gout can raise the chance of life-threatening diseases, such as a heart attack or stroke.

Treatment Options for Gout

NSAIDs, such as celecoxib, indomethacin, meloxicam, or sulindac, may be prescribed by your doctor, or you may be advised to use over-the-counter NSAIDs, such as naproxen or ibuprofen.

Based on your medical history, your doctor may prescribe steroids or other anti-inflammatory medications, such as colchicine (Colcrys).

Your doctor may also advise you to make lifestyle changes, such as exercising regularly and decreasing weight. Additionally, you may be advised to adopt dietary changes, such as lowering your intake of red meat, shellfish, alcoholic beverages and fructose-sweetened beverages.