

Hammertoes are often caused by an underlying muscle imbalance in the foot. When the small muscles in the foot that stabilize the toes and keep them straight are overpowered by the larger leg muscles that move them up and down, the toes will bend and curl. When this begins, the toes will be flexible and can still be straightened. After a period of time, the toes become rigid and fixed in the curled position. If your hammertoes are flexible, try these exercises to strengthen the muscles in the foot to keep them from getting worse, and maybe even reverse the process. These exercises should be done at least once daily.

### **The Toe Tap**

Stand flat on the ground in your bare feet. Raise all of your toes up off the ground as high as you can. Then starting with the little toes, slowly press them down to the ground. After the big toes are on the ground, start over by raising all of them up off the ground again. This motion is similar to tapping your fingers on a desk. Repeat this ten times.

### **Interlocking your Fingers and Toes**

Cross your right foot over your knee and place the fingers of your left hand between your toes. Squeeze your toes together, pinching your fingers between them. Spread the toes apart and squeeze them together again. Repeat this ten times then do the other foot. Like most exercises, this will get easier the more you do it. If you are having a lot of difficulty with this exercise, start with just your index finger between your first and second toe, then later add your middle finger between your second and third toes, and so on until you can fit all your fingers between your toes. Do this ten times on each foot. Eventually you will be able to spread your toes apart without using your fingers.

### **Gripping the Floor**

Grip the floor by pressing the pads of your toes (not the tips) into the floor without curling your toes. Relax and repeat this ten times. If your shoes have the proper amount of depth, you should be able to do this with shoes on.

## **A Word about Shoes**

Poorly fitting shoes are one of the major causes of hammertoes. Many people wear shoes that are too small for them, so it is important to have your feet measured periodically as your shoe size may increase, even in adulthood. A good shoe will allow your toes to move freely in them. Your shoes should not squeeze your toes together or be tight. If you have any corns or sore spots on your toes, your shoes are wrong for you.