

Bunions are a common foot ailment

If there's an abnormal bony protrusion at the base of your big toe, there's a good chance you're suffering from a bunion.

A bunion is a foot disorder that results in a swollen bump on the inside of the foot that turns the big toe inward toward the second toe. While it can be a hereditary condition, it can also be caused by wearing ill-fitting, narrow high-heeled shoes, according to Dr. Vito Giardina, chief of podiatry at St. Agnes Hospital in Baltimore.

"Many patients will complain of pain or swelling," said Dr. Giardina, a parishioner of St. Mary in Annapolis. "They complain that the joints are so large they can't find a shoe that fits."

Dr. Giardina said bunions are more common among women because of the kinds of shoes they wear. They tend to appear in middle age and the senior years, he said, but may also have a juvenile onset.

Bunions have different levels of severity, according to Dr. Giardina. They can often be treated simply by wearing more comfortable, wider shoes, or by taking anti-inflammatory medication. For those with chronic problems with bunions, outpatient surgical intervention may be necessary, he said. Recovery time can last from several weeks to several months.

Not all bunions are painful, according to Dr. Giardina, and sometimes they are discovered when doctors are examining feet for other problems.