

OS20lite Surgery for Problems of the Small Toes

This document will give you information about surgery for problems of the small toes. If you have any questions, you should ask your GP or other relevant health professional.

What problems can happen to the small toes?

The three main problems that can happen are deformity, pain in the toe joints and metatarsalgia.

Toe deformities such as claw toe and hammer toe happen when the tendons that move the toes get too tight or out of balance. The affected toe can rub on other toes and on the inside of your shoe, causing pressure and pain (see figure 1).

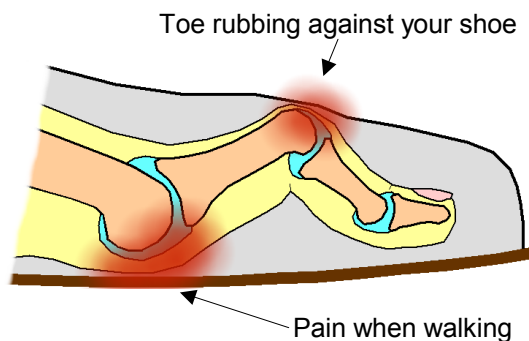


Figure 1

Problems caused by a hammer toe

Inflammatory arthritis such as rheumatoid arthritis can damage the toe joints and this may make them come out of position (dislocate).

What are the benefits of surgery?

Your toes should be straighter, so your foot should fit more comfortably in a normal shoe.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Putting padding between your toes and strapping them in place can help to stop pain caused by the toes rubbing.

Custom-made insoles for your shoes will help to take the pressure off any painful areas. Special shoes that are wider and deeper than normal can stop your toes rubbing.

What does the operation involve?

A variety of anaesthetic techniques are possible. The surgery depends on the problem with your toes and may involve releasing or lengthening tendons, putting joints back into place, straightening a toe and changing the shape of a bone.

Your surgeon may fix the toes in place with wires or tiny screws.

What complications can happen?

1 General complications of any operation

- Pain
- Bleeding
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Unsightly scarring
- Blood clots
- Difficulty passing urine

2 Specific complications of this operation

- Damage to nerves
- Damage to blood vessels
- Problems with bone healing
- Loss of movement in the toes
- Severe pain, stiffness and loss of use of the foot (Complex Regional Pain Syndrome)
- Pain in the ball of the foot
- Recurrent deformity

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home the same day or the day after.

For the first week, you will need to spend most of the time with your leg raised up so that the swelling settles.

It can take six weeks or longer before the swelling has gone down enough for you to wear a normal soft shoe.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, you should ask a member of the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Summary

If you have problems with your small toes that are causing pressure and pain, surgery should straighten your toes and help make your foot fit more comfortably into a normal shoe.

Further information

- NHS smoking helpline on 0800 022 4332 and at www.smokefree.nhs.uk
- www.eatwell.gov.uk – for advice on maintaining a healthy weight
- www.eidoactive.co.uk – for information on how exercise can help you
- www.aboutmyhealth.org – for support and information you can trust
- Internet Society of Orthopaedic Surgery and Trauma at www.orthogate.org
- American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons at www.aaos.org
- www.thefootandankleclinic.com
- British Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society at www.bofas.org.uk
- Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome Association at www.rsds.org
- NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 (0845 606 46 47 – textphone)

Acknowledgements

Author: Mr Stephen Milner DM FRCS (Tr. & Orth.)
Illustrations: Mr Stephen Milner DM FRCS (Tr. & Orth.)

Used under licence by The Horder Centre. This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

OS20lite

Issued June 2010

Expires end of December 2010



www.rcsed.ac.uk

