

Big toe joint pain

Information and self-management guide for patients



You have been given this information leaflet to help you understand more about the problems you are having and to provide some advice on what you can do to help your symptoms.

If any of the advice given makes your symptoms worse or creates a new pain, please stop and seek advice.

Podiatry telephone number: **0131 536 1627**

Big toe joint pain is also known as Hallux Limitus or Hallux Rigidus.

What are Hallux Limitus and Hallux Rigidus?

With these conditions, you may feel pain and stiffness in your big toe joint (the joint at the base of the big toe). When movement in the big toe joint is reduced, it is referred to as **Hallux Limitus**. When there is significantly reduced movement or the big toe joint is not moving at all, this is referred to as **Hallux Rigidus**.

What causes big toe joint pain?

Some of the most common causes of big toe joint pain are:

- Wearing ill-fitting or badly styled footwear, such as: high heels, hard thin soles or soles that are too soft
- Being overweight
- If you have recently started being more active/increased your activity level
- Activities/occupations that involve placing large amounts of pressure and/or strain on the foot and ankle, such as running or jumping
- Tight or weak muscles in the lower leg and/or foot
- Injury to the toe/foot
- Foot deformity
- Arthritis in the foot or ankle
- Some underlying medical conditions.

Signs and symptoms

- Pain and stiffness in your big toe joint
- Swelling around your big toe joint
- There may be an increase in size of your big toe joint due to increased bone formation, which will feel firm to touch.

What can I do to help myself?

It is important to try to work out what leads to your pain. Avoiding the causes or triggers of painful symptoms is one of the most important parts of helping your recovery.

Consider the following options:

Footwear

The shoe style you wear should accommodate the width and shape of your foot and have semi rigid soles- avoid narrow, pointed shoes. The heel height should be between 1cm and 2 cm and preferably have a firm fastening such as lacing. In this case footwear with a rocker sole would be beneficial.

Modify activity levels

It is good to keep moving and exercising but you may benefit from considering alternative ways of keeping active temporarily. Lower impact activities (such as cycling or swimming) may be a good option for you. If this does not help a period of rest may be suitable.

Ice packs

Apply an ice pack to the painful site for 20 minutes 2-3 times daily (ensure ice is not applied directly to your skin- a cloth may be a useful barrier).

Aim for a healthy body weight

Being overweight increases pressure and strain to the affected area and could reduce your chances of successful resolution. If you need support with this please speak with your GP or the Get Moving service.

Pain medication

Some pain medication may help to reduce your symptoms and help you to move more comfortably. Discuss this with your Pharmacist or GP.

Being patient

This is not always easy but we know it may take time for your symptoms to settle.

Exercises

Please see back page of this leaflet.

What if my symptoms fail to resolve?

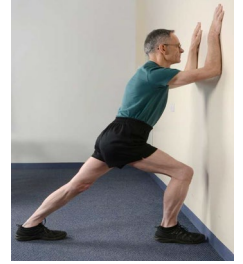
If after 6 weeks of following this self management advice your problem has not improved, seek advice from a Podiatrist.

Exercises

Calf stretch 1

1. Place leg to be stretched behind you
2. Keep feet facing forward and heels on the ground
3. Lean forward on the front foot until the stretch is felt in the calf

Hold the stretch for 20 -30 seconds if comfortable. Repeat 3-4 times daily.



Calf stretch 2

1. Position feet as for above
2. This time bend both knees and transfer the majority of your weight through the back foot until the stretch is felt.

Hold the stretch for 20 -30 seconds if comfortable. Repeat 3-4 times daily.



Useful Apps

NHS 24 MSK help

Useful web links

For further exercises and information

- www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/muscle-bone-and-joints/exercises/exercises-for-foot-problems
- <https://livewellwithpain.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/10-footsteps-v2.pdf>
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=3F5Sly9JQao&feature=emb_logo
- www.edinburghleisure.co.uk/get-moving
- https://policyonline.nhslothian.scot/Policies/PatientInformation/Hallux_rigidus_big_toe_arthritis.pdf

