

Hallux rigidus (big toe arthritis)

Information for patients

What is hallux rigidus?

Hallux rigidus refers to arthritic changes to your big toe joint.

What are the causes?

- Trauma or injury
- Poor or ill fitting footwear
- A family history of having hallux rigidus
- Structural changes within your foot (e.g. Hypermobility feet).



Hallux rigidus affects 1 in 40 individuals aged over 50 years old and it is twice as likely to affect women than men.

What are the symptoms?

- Painful and swollen big toe joint
- Reduced movement in your big toe
- Pain becomes worse when weight is put onto the joint; when you wear soft-soled shoes or when you are barefoot.

How is it diagnosed?

An appropriate healthcare professional will discuss your foot symptoms and enquire about your general health. A physical examination of your foot will be carried out to assess your movement, response to particular tests and level of pain. This can be clinically diagnosed. An x-ray might be requested if surgery is being considered.

What is the management of hallux rigidus?

Many patients are happy to self-manage their symptoms with painkillers/anti-inflammatory medication or other non-invasive treatments, such as:

- Lifestyle and health changes
- Changes to your activity
- Wearing appropriate footwear
- Podiatry.

Lifestyle and health changes

The following adjustments to your lifestyle can help to manage hallux rigidus:

- Maintaining a healthy diet and weight
- Getting 7-9 hours of quality sleep per night
- Reducing your alcohol intake
- Quit smoking.

Not all of these recommendations may be relevant to you, but these are important factors to consider to optimise your outcome.

Further information and support can be found at <https://nhsinform.scot/healthy-living>

How can I manage it?

- Rest/immobilisation/changes to your activity as required
 - For example: if pain is caused by running, switching to an activity with less impact (such as swimming) may help.
- Pain relief or anti-inflammatory medication
 - Speak to your GP or pharmacist
- Wear appropriate footwear
 - Avoiding high heeled or narrow footwear. Footwear with support may also help symptoms further.

Podiatry

Through a thorough examination, a Podiatrist can:

- Help you establish what may be causing your pain
- Provide you with a personal treatment plan to help and/or resolve symptoms
- Arrange for further investigation, if required.

More invasive management options

In some cases the symptoms may persist and more invasive treatments may be required/requested by you, as the patient:

- **Corticosteroid injection:** Steroid injections are only carried out in some hallux rigidus cases
- **Surgery:** Surgery is only required if pain is present and symptoms are unable to be controlled by the methods described above.