

What is a bunion?

A bunion (medical term: hallux valgus) is a deformity of the big toe where there is an angle between the toe and the foot. This leads to widening of the foot and a prominence or bump over the joint causing problems with footwear, inflammation of the joint and pain. The big toe can start to crowd the other toes, which may also become deformed (hammer/claw toes). Sometimes pain is felt under the second toe "knuckle" joint.

Do I need an operation?

Bunion surgery is one of the most commonly performed foot and ankle procedures. It may help to relieve pain and improve the alignment of the toe in most people; however, there is no guarantee that the foot will be perfectly straight or pain-free after surgery. Some patients worry that the deformity may become worse and therefore prefer it to be corrected earlier rather than later. However, rapid progression of a bunion deformity is unusual. The decision to go ahead with surgery is usually made based on the following symptoms:

- The deformity is painful and worsening
- The second toe is involved and becomes a problem
- Difficulty obtaining suitable shoes
- There is significant disruption to your lifestyle or activities



Please Note: Surgery is performed only for pain and is not performed for cosmetic purposes. Pain, discomfort, and failure of conservative measures to relieve symptoms and meet lifestyle needs should be the major considerations for surgical correction

What does the operation involve?

Surgery is carried out on a day case basis. It is usually performed under a General Anaesthetic (you are asleep). Surgery involves removing the bump and straightening out the angle between your toe and the long bone in your foot (metatarsal). To do this we firstly release the tight soft tissue on the outside of your toe. This sometimes involves a small scar between the first and second toes. The bump is removed from the bunion and then we divide the long bone (osteotomy), realign it and then fix with two small screws (scarf osteotomy). Sometimes an additional operation is carried out on the toe bone where a wedge of bone is removed from the toe and this can give some additional correction (Akin osteotomy). Again, this is fixed with some metalwork, usually a small staple.

What happens after surgery?

Recovery from this type of surgery can be lengthy. You will be able to weight bear soon after your operation, but you will be very limited in walking for the first 2 weeks or so. It is important for you to know that bunion correction surgery may impact on some of your activities. Footwear limitations may continue despite having had surgery.

On the right there is a guideline outlining the expected recovery period:

1. Bandage/rest/elevation – 2 weeks (Review in the Outpatients clinic or GP nurse clinic)
2. Special, forefoot off-loading shoe – 6 weeks (Review in the Outpatients clinic with x-rays)
3. Return to work – 6 weeks
4. Return to driving – 6 weeks
5. Return to activities – 3 months
6. Pain/swelling resolved and back to normal – 12 months

What are the intended benefits of bunion correction surgery?

The potential benefits from surgery are:

- A reduction in pain
- Improved alignment of the big toe, making the toe straighter
- The bulkiness of the joint is removed, reducing the bump and therefore footwear is more comfortable.
- Improved alignment of the toe

An improvement in these factors may also have a positive impact on your mobility and function.

What are the alternatives to surgery?

If you decide not to have an operation, you can manage your symptoms by changing your activity levels, using painkillers, and changing footwear to extra width or special footwear, possibly with a cushion-pad or in-shoe foot support. You should avoid high heels and shoes with a narrow toe.

Can I do nothing?

In general, this is not a life or limb threatening condition and surgery is not essential. Doing nothing is an option. Surgery can be done at anytime and we can continue to monitor your symptoms.

Your operation may be carried out by a Podiatrist

This operation is one of those that may be carried out by a Podiatrist. Our Podiatrist has specialised in the care of foot problems for many years and has gained additional training to allow them to work as a member of the operating team. The Podiatrist is fully capable of performing this procedure to the highest standards and you will receive the same care as provided by a surgeon.



What are the potential risks of surgery?

The majority of patients are satisfied with the outcome of this surgery. The success rate of bunion correction surgery is about 80%. There are general risks of surgery: wound infection 7%, bone infection 1%, painful scar (5%), blood clot in the leg or lung 1%, Complex regional Pain Syndrome (lasting debilitating pain) 1%, bone healing problems 1%, amputation 0.01%, death 0.01%.

Also specific risks related to this operation:

- Numbness or sensitivity in the toe (5%)
- Pain in the ball of the foot (5%)
- Residual pain despite surgery (5%)
- Worse foot pain (5%)
- Recurrent deformity (20%)
- Persistent swelling (5%)
- Metalwork problems (5%)
- Risk of vascular compromise (1%)
- Need for further surgery
- Risk of patient dissatisfaction with the outcomes of surgery

In the worst case, some of these risks may leave you worse off following surgery.

Smoking, other illnesses (such as diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis) or drugs (steroids or blood thinning drugs) increase the risks of surgery.

For appointment enquiries please phone the
Waiting list office: 0131 2423437