

# Hammer toe

## Information for patients

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### **What is hammer toe?**

Hammer toes are a deformity in the bend or joint of a toe.

### **What are the causes/risk factors?**

- Bunions (hallux valgus)
- Trauma or injury
- Ill fitting footwear
- Weakness in your toe joint or dislocation.

It is estimated that between 2-20% of the population have developed hammer toe.

### **What are the symptoms?**

- In many cases, hammer toes do not cause any pain
- If there is pain, it is usually around the joint of the toe or at the end of the toe
- There may be pain caused by calluses and corns that have developed as a result of the hammer toe
- Symptoms are made worse by flexing your toe, wearing ill fitting footwear or weight-bearing activity.

### **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 a hammer toe?**

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
- Padding the affected toe
- Wearing appropriate footwear

- Podiatry.

## **Lifestyle and health changes**

The following adjustments to your lifestyle can help to manage a hammer toe:

- 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
- Wearing toe sleeves or pads around the affected toe- these are available online or in a chemist shop
- Pain relief or anti-inflammatory medication
  - Speak to your GP or pharmacist
- 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.

## **Surgery**

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

Surgery is only required if pain is present and symptoms are unable to be controlled by the methods described above.