

Hallux Valgus (Bunion) Surgery

What is a bunion?

Hallux valgus is often referred to as a bunion deformity. The big toe drifts towards the smaller toes and a small bump appears on the inner aspect of the foot along with a red swelling in the region of the big toe joint. Most people have no symptoms but some develop pain over the bunion, difficulty with wearing shoes.

How did I get it?

It is common for bunion problems to run in families. Wearing inappropriate shoes and laxity of joints also contribute.

What can be done about it?

Conservative management: Most bunions can be managed with the use of appropriate footwear and in some cases with the use of orthotics (inserts used in the shoes). If conservative measures fail to improve symptoms, Surgery can correct the deformity, narrow the foot and give better biomechanics to the foot.

What does the operation involve?

The operation to the forefoot can be performed either under general anaesthesia or regional anaesthesia. The operation itself involves making an incision over the affected toe, cutting and realigning the bones and fixing them using small screws and staples (if appropriate) to achieve a better alignment and biomechanics. There are different techniques, and your surgeon will discuss which is appropriate for you.

Is it painful?

Whilst you are in hospital the medical staff will give you pain killers as required and prescribed. When you are at home you may find Paracetamol or Ibuprofen (if tolerated) useful for controlling any pain. Instructions on management of pain will be given by the nursing staff before you leave the hospital.

How long does recovery take?

Most patients will go home the same day or stay in hospital for one night. You have only a padded dressing and bandage to the wound and will be given a special shoe, which helps to offload the forefoot. The physiotherapist will give instructions on how to wear the shoe as well as the use of elbow crutches if necessary.

For the first two weeks you are advised to restrict your walking distance to within the house and garden and keep it elevated to reduce swelling. Your dressing will be changed at around

14 days and the stitches are usually dissolvable. You will need to wear the special shoe for around 6 weeks. Following this it is advisable to wear loose fitting shoes (sports shoes). Normal footwear (which is well fitting) can be worn about three months after the operation. Patients having had only the left foot operated on will be able to drive an automatic car within two weeks. Those who have had an operation on the right side will be able to drive after about 6-8 weeks.

You are advised not to fly after surgery for about 6 weeks. Swimming will be possible once the sutures are removed and the wound is healing satisfactorily. Going back to work will depend on the type of work you do. For example if you have a desk job and can do your work with your foot up and in a special shoe you may be able to return to work after 2-4 weeks.

If on the other hand you do manual work where there would be a lot of pressure on the foot then you may need 8-12 weeks off work.

Please follow “Precautions following Surgery” as mentioned elsewhere on this website.

What can go wrong?

All operative interventions have an inbuilt risk and complication rate. The risks following hallux valgus surgery are as follows:

- Infection (may need antibiotics)
- Neuroma (injury to a nerve)
- Deep vein thrombosis (blood clot in the vein)
- Prolonged swelling and pain
- Recurrence of the deformity, range of 20%
- Metal breakage (screws used in the operation)
- Stiffness of the joint
- Non union

The above complications are rare but can occur.