

Hallux Rigidus – First MTP fusion

What is Hallux Rigidus?

Hallux Rigidus (or Hallux Limitus) is arthritis of big toe metatarsophalangeal joint. There is usually pain and swelling in the region of the big toe joint. Most people have no symptoms but some develop pain over the joint, difficulty with wearing shoes.

What can be done about it?

Conservative management: Most 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, steroid injections to the joint may be tried especially in early stages of the condition. If that fails or arthritis has progressed beyond this stage, surgery may be the only option.

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, removing the remaining cartilage on the joint surfaces and fusing the two bones together to eliminate pain. If the joint replacement is being done, then your surgeon would give you more information prior to the operation.

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? / What happens after surgery?

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 removed at two weeks. You will need to wear the special shoe for around 2-3 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 24 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. Most patients manage to wear shoes with a heel up to an inch after First MTP fusion. If you are having a replacement of the toe, then you should generally expect to have more movements and function with the toe.

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 First MTP fusion 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
- Metal breakage (plates / screws used in the operation)
- Metatarsalgia (Pin under the ball of foot)
- Non union
- Failure of the operation

The above complications are rare but can occur.