

Lesser toe deformities

Trauma and Orthopaedics

Information for patients and carers

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Caring for you

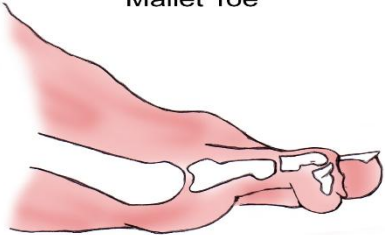
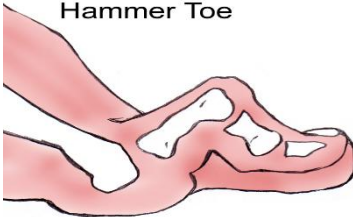
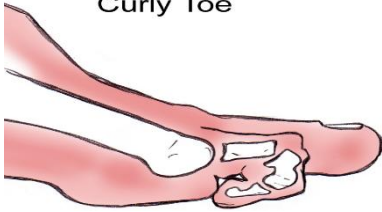
What are lesser toe deformities?

Your big toe is called the great toe. The other 4 toes on your foot are called lesser toes. Each lesser toe has 3 bones with 2 joints.

A deformity happens when a toe is bent into an unusual position. The toes can become inflamed, swollen and painful. Corns, sores or bony lumps can also form, which can cause problems when walking or playing sports.

Common types of deformity

The most common types of deformities are hammer toe, claw toe, and mallet toe. Normally, the 3 bones in the toe form a straight line. Deformities can change this shape.

A claw toe involves abnormal positions of all 3 joints in the toe. The first bone lifts up and the second 2 bones point downwards.	Claw Toe 
In a mallet toe, the first 2 bones are straight and the end bone points downwards.	Mallet Toe 
A hammer toe is when the first bone lifts slightly, the second bone points downwards and the bone at the end is almost flat.	Hammer Toe 
A curly toe (overlapping toe) is when the toe curls under and inwards.	Curly Toe 

Corns are painful areas of thick skin on the toes. They are formed by unusual pressure on the skin of the toes, usually due to poorly fitting shoes. When shoes rub against a bony point of the toe, the skin thickens.

A hard corn forms where the skin is dry and a soft corn forms where the skin is moist, such as between the toes.

If the pressure continues, corns can break down and create skin ulcers, which can lead to infection.

Causes and symptoms

Tight shoes, narrow pointed shoes and high heels are the most common cause of lesser toe deformities.

2 muscles on opposite sides of the toes work together to straighten and bend the toes. Shoes that keep a toe bent for too long can make the muscles tighten and the tendons shorten or contract. Over time this can make it harder to straighten the toe and the toe may become fixed in that position.

Other common causes include:

- diabetes
- poor blood supply to the foot
- brain, spinal cord, or nerve injury
- arthritis

Symptoms may include the toe looking different, pain or irritation when wearing shoes, redness or corns on the top or ends of the toes.

How are lesser toe deformities diagnosed?

A specialist will examine your toe to check:

- movement and flexibility
- stability
- sensation
- redness, swelling or corns

You may also have X-rays of your toe taken.

How are lesser toe deformities treated?

Footwear changes: avoid high heels and tight, pointed shoes. Use comfortable shoes with a deep, wide, soft toe box.

Orthoses: can help to control muscle imbalance.

Podiatry: removal of corns and calluses and providing padding to reduce pressure and protect sore areas.

Surgery: is offered if other treatment does not work. This involves the correction of the deformity.

Arthroplasty: this is used to treat claw, mallet, and hammer toes. The procedure includes releasing soft tissues, transferring and lengthening tendons to straighten the toe into a more normal position.

Arthrodesis: is used when the deformity has been present for a long time. The joint can no longer function properly and may need to be fused. This is done by removing the end of the bones and holding the bones together with a temporary wire for 4 to 6 weeks until the bones fuse together and heal.

You can walk in a hard-soled surgical shoe during this time. It is important to keep the dressings dry and clean to prevent infections.

The wires are removed in the outpatient clinic at around 6 weeks. This is a pain-free procedure and does not need anaesthetic.

Are there any risks involved?

Problems after surgery are rare, but may include:

- infection
- wound problems
- nerve injury
- stiffness
- swelling
- overcorrection
- the deformity returning

Further information

Please let staff know of any concerns or questions you may have. We will do our best to answer your queries quickly.