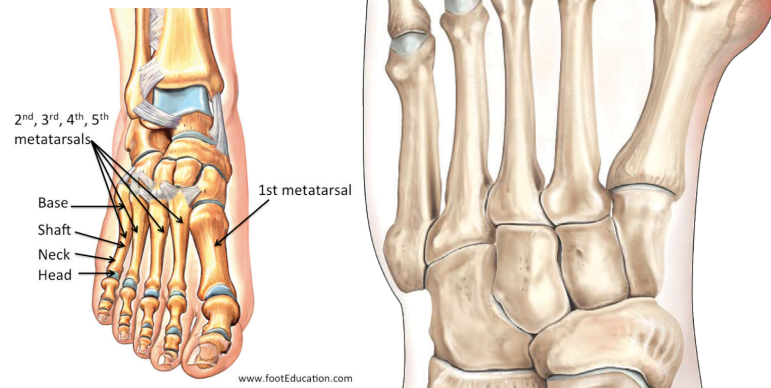


BUNION



What is a bunion?

A bunion is a bony lump on the side of your foot at the base of your big toe, caused by splaying between the first and second metatarsal bones (long bones to the toes). There can also be a bony growth build up on the first metatarsal head or ball, adding to the prominence. In some people, the first metatarsal can also slightly elevate off the ground as part of the deformity, causing more weight to transfer onto the 2nd and 3rd metatarsal heads - this is called “transfer metatarsalgia” and causes pain under the ball of your foot, and can progress to clawing and even dislocation of the small toes. In a small percentage of people with bunions, this transfer overload transmits up to the mid-foot joints and causes mid-foot arthritis (pain on the top of your foot). Bunions tend to run in families.

Wearing narrow shoes increases the risk of getting bunions, especially if high heels, pointed toes or badly designed soles. Some people with bunions have arthritis in the big toe joint, but many people have no other joint problems.

What are the benefits of surgery?

Your big toe would be straighter, so your foot will fit more comfortably in a normal shoe. If you have elevation of the first metatarsal and transfer pain, surgery restores the mechanical alignment and balance of forces in your foot, and helps pain. The surgery is not just cosmetic, but improves the function of your foot, and may stop it getting worse

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Putting padding over the bunion or a spacer between your big toe and second toe can help give you relief from the pain caused by the bunion rubbing. Using wide-fitting shoes from a good-quality shoe shop may be enough. If not, the orthotics (surgical appliances) department at the hospital will be able to give you advice about special shoes.

What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

Your surgeon can ask an orthotist to see you. They are experienced in treating foot problems using insoles and shoe modifications.

Bunions do not get better without surgery. Most bunions slowly get worse with time. Wearing sensible footwear will usually prevent them from getting rapidly worse. The skin over the bunion can become inflamed where it rubs on the inside of your shoe. Sometimes your skin can get infected and cause an ulcer. Aching in other parts of your foot is common but this is caused by other related problems with how your foot works rather than the bunion itself.

Some people don't want surgery, but want to know what to be aware of, if the problem is getting worse - pain under the ball of the foot, the smaller toes start to claw, or pain starts on the top of your foot.

What does the operation involve?

Usually, people have a general anaesthetic, then an ankle block (local anaesthetic injected around the nerves of your ankle) at the start of the operation. This typically takes most or all the pain away for the first 18-24 hours.



Traditionally, bunion surgery was very painful - modern bunion surgery is not, with screws to hold the reshaped bones, and the ankle block both making a huge difference. Commonly after the operation people say “I had much less pain than I expected, and I wish I had had this surgery years ago”.

The operation usually takes 45-90 minutes, and you are put in bunion bandaging and a post-op shoe for 6 weeks afterwards, but can carefully weightbear in the shoe.

Your surgeon will discuss with you which of the following procedures the operation is likely to involve.

- Removing the bunion.
- Releasing the tight ligaments and tightening stretched ligaments.
- Cutting and realigning the bones of your big toe.
- Stiffening a joint (arthrodesis).
- Straightening one or more of your other toes.

How can I prepare myself for the operation?

If you smoke, stopping smoking will reduce your risk of developing problems and will improve your long-term health. Nicotine and smoke is known to prevent bones from healing, and increase the risk of wound healing problems and infection.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight. Regular exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help you to recover and improve your long term health. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

What complications can happen?

General complications of any operation

- bleeding
- infection of the surgical site (wound)
- allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication
- blood clot in your leg
- blood clot in your lung
- difficulty passing urine
- chest infection

Specific complications of this operation

- damage to nerves (some numbness of the big toe can occur, but is usually temporary)
- problems with bone healing (very unlikely - 1%)
- loss of movement in your big toe
- ongoing pain - not common
- pain in the ball of your foot
- over-correction of your big toe
- the deformity slowly coming back

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home the same day or the day after. Spend most of the time during the 2 weeks with your leg raised so that the swelling settles. My nurse and I see you for a wound check and re-bandaging 2 weeks after the surgery, then again at 6 weeks for an X-ray to check bone healing. Usually you can start to get going in normal shoes after that. Swelling and stiffness can persist for 3-6 months, but most people are comfortable at 6-8 weeks after surgery.

Summary

Modern bunion surgery is safe, reliable, with low risks and fairly low pain levels afterwards, and corrects the cosmetic and functional problems caused by the bunion.