

Hammer Toe

A hammertoe is a deformity that causes a toe to become bent upward in the middle so it resembles a hammer. Hammertoes often occur in conjunction with other toe problems. It is possible to develop corns on top of the middle joint of the hammertoe.

Patients who have hammertoes try to manage them by treating the symptoms. This involves padding the toe and changing or stretching footwear for comfort. If you still experience discomfort from the hammertoe you may consider surgery.

The hammertoe can be flexible or stiff. Depending on the flexibility of the toe and the preference of your orthopaedic foot and ankle surgeon, several different surgeries can be used to treat the hammertoe.

What is the goal of hammertoe surgery?

The goal of surgery is to treat pain that has not gotten better with non-surgical treatment.

What signs indicate hammertoe surgery may be needed?

If you have pain or cannot comfortably wear shoes after trying non-operative treatments, hammertoe surgery may be an option.

When should I avoid hammertoe surgery?

Patients with multiple problems in addition to the hammertoe should avoid surgery for just the hammertoe alone. Additional surgery may be needed to address the other deformities as well. Other reasons to avoid hammertoe surgery include active infections, poor circulation, and any serious illness that would make surgery unsafe. You should discuss your health history with your orthopaedic surgeon prior to considering hammertoe surgery.

General Details of the Procedure

Most often, hammertoe correction is done as an outpatient procedure. This means that you can go home the same day as the surgery. The surgery can either be done with you fully asleep, or it may be done with you awake after you have been given medicine that makes the foot go numb temporarily.

What happens after surgery?

You may be given a special shoe to wear after surgery to help with walking. Recovery normally can take a few weeks depending on the type of surgery that was done.

You will be asked to keep your foot elevated at the level of your heart for the first few weeks after surgery, which requires lying on a couch or bed with your foot up. You may also need either crutches or a walker after surgery depending on your ability to walk.

Stitches are usually taken out two to three weeks after surgery, and if pins were placed, these will be taken out within a few weeks. You may not put your foot under water until the stitches and pins are removed.

If the hammertoe is on your right foot, you may not be able to drive a car for a number of weeks depending on the type of surgery you have.

Your orthopaedic surgeon may ask you to do exercises to stretch and move the toe at home after surgery. This can help with flexibility of the toe and to maintain motion in the toe.

It is normal to have swelling after surgery. It may take up to one year before the swelling resolves.

Frequently Asked Questions

If I am treated with surgery will the hammertoe ever come back?

It is possible that after surgery your hammertoe may come back. If this happens and you have discomfort in the toe, an additional surgery may be needed to address the pain.

Can I bend my toe after surgery?

Depending on the specific surgery used, you may or may not be able to bend your toe once it has healed. Ask your orthopaedic surgeon what type of surgery is needed for your hammertoe.

