

Lesser Toe Deformities

What are lesser toe deformities?

Toes which are not big toes are lesser toes. They become deformed when more pressure is exerted on them than their joints can resist. These deformities are worsened by muscle imbalance. It is more common in females than males. The most common lesser toe deformities are:

- Hammer toe
- Claw toe
- Curly toe

What problems do they cause?

In many patients these deformities do not cause any symptoms. The common symptoms of lesser toe deformities are:

- Pain due to rubbing on shoes
- Rubbing on other toes
- Callosities/corns at the site of rubbing
- Pain on the tips of the toes
- Pain in the ball of the foot

What can be done about it?

Non-operative treatment: Most can be managed with the use of appropriate footwear and in some cases with the use of insoles/toe sleeves/cushions. In those who do not respond to non-operative treatment, surgery is considered .

What does the operation involve?

The operation to the forefoot can be performed either under general anaesthesia or regional anaesthesia. The operation is performed as a day case procedure. The operation itself involves making a cut over the affected toe, removing parts of bone/cutting tendons to straighten the toe. A stainless steel wire usually holds the toe in position while it heals in the corrected position for 6 weeks. After the operation you will be placed in bulky bandage and allowed to walk as able in an offloading shoe. The wire is removed at 6 weeks from the time of the operation.

What happens after surgery?

After the operation you will be placed in bulky bandage and allowed to walk as able in an offloading shoe. Your dressing will be changed and the stitches are removed at around 2 weeks. You will need to wear the special shoe for around 6 weeks. The wire is removed at 6 weeks from the time of the operation.

Patients having had only the left foot operated 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.

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.

What are the complications of surgery?

- Infection
- Numbness
- Clots
- Swelling
- Pain
- Recurrent deformity
- Loss of blood supply to toe which may result in toe amputation (very rare)

