

Big toe arthritis (Hallux Rigidus)

What is Hallux Rigidus?

Hallux Rigidus is the wear and tear (arthritis) of the big toe joint. It can develop due to overuse, previous injury (fracture), and other arthritic conditions (rheumatoid, gout etc.).

What are the symptoms?

Usual symptoms include pain on movements of the big toe, stiffness, swelling, and bony bump which may rub on shoes.

What treatment options are available for Hallux Rigidus?

First line of treatment is non-operative:

- Activity modification
- Shoe modification
- Pain medications
- Steroid injection: Generally gives pain relief for a limited period
- Operation

What operations are available for Hallux Rigidus?

- **Cheilectomy:** In early stages of arthritis bony projections from around the joint are removed to improve pain and movements. This operation is performed as a day case procedure. Patients are allowed to weight bear as able in a hard soled shoe after the procedure. Stiches are removed in about 2 weeks from the time of the operation. Recovery from the operation takes 2 to 6 weeks. Driving is allowed after 2 weeks.
- **Big toe fusion:** This procedure is considered the gold standard for advanced big toe arthritis. The aim of the procedure is pain relief. The big toe joint will be stiff after the operation (movements are sacrificed to achieve pain relief).The operation is performed as a day case procedure. The operation is usually done under a general anaesthetic. Skin cut is made on top of the big toe joint, worn out bits of the joint are removed, healthy bones forming the joint surface are held together with plate and screws. You will be placed in a bulky dressing after the operation. You will be allowed to weight bear as able in an offloading shoe for 6 weeks. Stiches are removed at about 2 weeks. Serial X-rays are done at 6 and if needed 12 weeks. Return to sports/running is permitted after 12 weeks. Driving a manual car is allowed after 6 to 8 weeks. If surgery is performed on the left foot an automatic car can be driven after 2 weeks.
- **Big toe replacement:** This gets rid of the joint, but unlike a fusion, keeps some movement. The procedure achieves pain relief and preserves joint movements. However, the joint is artificial and can wear out with time needing further surgery. The operation is performed as a day case procedure. The operation is usually done under a general anaesthesia. Skin cut is made on top of the big toe joint, worn out bits of the joint are removed and plastic joint is placed. You will be placed in a bulky dressing after the operation. You will be allowed to weight bear as able in a post-op

What are the complications of surgery?

Big toe joint surgery has a very high rate of success with complications occurring in a small percentage of patients

- Infection
- Wound problems,
- bleeding,
- Clots
- Failure of fusion (applies to fusion surgery)
- Numbness
- Chronic pain syndrome
- Problems with metalwork