

Minimally Invasive Hallux Valgus (Bunion) Surgery

A Patient Guide

What Are Bunions?

A bunion is the lay term for hallux valgus, or deviation of the great toe. The deformity is complex and involves the big toe long bone (metatarsal) to deviate away (inward) from the second toe and the big toe itself to deviate outward, toward the second toe. Due to this movement, a prominence on the inside of the foot (the bunion) occurs and cause symptoms. Contrary to popular belief, it is not a new growth of bone.

What Causes Them?

There are a number of causes including genetics, footwear (high heels, narrow toe box), family history and inflammatory joint disorders (e.g. rheumatoid arthritis) . Other cause have been implicate such as flat feet and lax ligaments.

What Are The Symptoms?

Most commonly pain around the bunion when wearing closed foot wear and a deformity that may get worse over time. Pain may also be experienced under the balls of the toe (metatarsalgia) or in the big toe joint. Normally wearing sandals or no shoes, relives symptoms. Some patients with bunions have no symptoms at all.

Will It Get Worse?

Progression of the deformity usually occurs, but over what time period is difficult to predict. This can take years.

What Is The Treatment?

If you have no discomfort or pain, then you do not need to do anything. If you have symptoms, there are a number of non-surgical options you should try, before considering surgery:

Modify or change your foot wear- the most important thing to do. A soft, wider shoe, with a small heel, which accommodates the foot well. Use a shoe stretcher, your current shoes may be made to fit.

Bunion Pads- Often made from silicone rubber, these protect the prominent area from rubbing.

Silicon Spacers- These can prevent toes rubbing if placed in between the first and second toes.

Surgery- If non-surgical option fail to resolve symptoms, then surgery can be considered.

What Does Surgery Involve?

This will depend on the nature of the deformity that you have. Mild, moderate and sometimes severe deformities can be corrected by an operation which involves releasing the tight tissues, cutting the big toe long bone (metatarsal osteotomy) , shifting it back to it's original position, then fixing it with 2 or 3 screws. Sometimes severe deformities or those with arthritis are better served with a fusion of the big toe joint. The operation can be performed as a same day surgery procedure, under a general anesthetic and ankle block, making the whole foot numb for 6-12 hours. Most patient experience pain after surgery but it can be managed easily with pain medications, ice and some elevation.