

Bye Bye Bunions



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What Is A Bunion?

A bunion is one problem that can develop due to *hallux valgus*, a foot deformity. The term "hallux valgus" is Latin and means a turning outward (*valgus*) of the big toe (*hallux*). The bone which joins the big toe, the first metatarsal, becomes prominent on the inner border of the foot. This bump is the bunion and is made up of bone and soft tissue.

Can Bunions Be Prevented?

Bunions often become painful if they are allowed to progress. But not all bunions progress. Many bunion problems can be managed without surgery. In general, bunions that are not painful do not need surgical correction. For this reason, orthopaedic surgeons do not recommend "preventive" surgery for bunions that do not hurt; with proper preventive care, they may never become a problem.

Is Bunion Surgery For You?

If nonsurgical treatment fails, you may want to consider surgery. Many studies have found that 85 to 90 percent of patients who undergo bunion surgery are satisfied with the results.

Reasons that you may benefit from bunion surgery commonly include:

- Severe foot pain that limits your everyday activities, including walking and wearing reasonable shoes. You may find it hard to walk more than a few blocks (even in athletic shoes) without significant pain.
- Chronic big toe inflammation and swelling that doesn't improve with rest or medications.
- Toe deformity—a drifting in of your big toe toward the small toes.
- Toe stiffness—inability to bend and straighten your toe.
- Failure to obtain pain relief from nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. Their effectiveness in controlling toe pain varies greatly from person to person.
- Failure to substantially improve with other treatments such as a change in shoes and anti-inflammatory medication.

As you explore bunion surgery, be aware that so-called "simple" or "minimal" surgical procedures are often inadequate "quick fixes" that can do more harm than good. And beware of unrealistic claims that surgery can give you a "perfect" foot. The goal of surgery is to relieve as much pain, and correct as much deformity as is realistically possible. It is not meant to be cosmetic.

Realistic Expectations About Bunion Surgery

An important factor in deciding whether to have bunion surgery is understanding what the procedure can and can not do. The vast majority of patients who undergo bunion surgery experience a dramatic reduction of foot pain after surgery, along with a significant improvement in the alignment of their big toe. However, bunion surgery will not allow you to wear a smaller shoe size or narrow-pointed shoes. Although you will have some shoe restrictions for the rest of your life, the relief from pain is the primary goal of surgery and takes precedence over shoe style.

