

WHAT IS HALLUX LIMITUS?

This often painful condition is characterised by a decrease in function of the 1st metatarsophalangeal joint – this is the joint that attaches the big toe to the long bone (1st metatarsal) in your forefoot. This reduced function is noted in the amount that the big toe, known as the hallux, can bend upwards. This upward movement, called dorsiflexion, is necessary when walking to allow efficient propulsion. The amount of restriction at the joint can vary from mild to severe but it tends to be a progressive problem that worsens over time.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

As the name suggests, the movement available to the big toe will be limited. It is sometimes possible to feel or hear creaking or clicking from the joint when it moves, which is known as ‘crepitus’. The problem is degenerative and osteoarthritic in nature, where the natural smoothness of the movement between the 1st metatarsal and the hallux is compromised, causing stiffness and discomfort. The joint can also become enlarged and appear swollen. In some people, small spurs of bone can develop across the top of the joint which can further hinder joint movement.

Hallux Limitus can also change the way you walk. If there is restricted movement, or pain, at this joint then it may cause other areas of your foot to compensate, creating problems elsewhere in your lower limb.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

Treatment options depend on how far advanced the degeneration or restriction in movement is. Some patients can experience short term improvement by gently manipulating or rotating the joint by hand. If the area is red, hot and swollen then the use of oral anti-inflammatory medication may provide some relief - icing and elevating the leg should also help.

You should seek to protect and rest the joint as much as is practicable. Longer term treatments may require a change of footwear, and/or the issue of insoles or custom-made orthotics. It is possible that your podiatrist may request imaging, such as an x-ray, to identify any joint narrowing or bony changes. If conservative options fail to manage the symptoms, a surgical opinion may be warranted. Your podiatrist will be able to arrange a referral if this proves to be the case.

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about the problem with your foot. This leaflet is not a substitute for professional medical advice and should be used in conjunction with verbal information and treatment given.

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