

HALLUX RIGIDUS

WHAT IS HALLUX RIGIDUS?

This often painful condition is characterised by a loss of function in the 1st metatarsophalangeal joint – this is the joint that attaches the big toe to the long bone (1st metatarsal) in your forefoot. Normally, this joint allows the big toe, known as the hallux, to bend upwards. This upward movement, called dorsiflexion, is necessary when walking to allow efficient propulsion.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

As the name suggests, the movement available to the big toe will be non-existent or negligible. It is sometimes possible to feel or hear creaking or clicking from the joint when you walk, which is known as ‘crepitus’. The problem is degenerative and osteoarthritic in nature, where the natural smooth gliding movement between the 1st metatarsal and the hallux is lost, causing complete stiffness and joint immobility. 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 also hinders joint movement. Hallux rigidus 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 disabling or painful the condition is. If the pain is mild then oral anti-inflammatory medication, a change of footwear and/or the issue of orthotics may be enough to provide relief. Moderate pain levels can be alleviated by a steroid injection into the site.

It is possible that your podiatrist may request imaging, such as an x-ray, to confirm their diagnosis and assess the extent of any joint damage. 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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