

HALLUX VALGUS (BUNION)

WHAT IS A BUNION?

A bunion, technically termed hallux valgus, is a common foot deformity that affects the alignment of the big toe and the long bone (1st metatarsal) in the forefoot that it attaches to. Instead of being straight, the big toe deviates towards the second toe. In some cases this can be a mild deviation but in severe cases the big toes can crossover or under-lap the second toe. As the big toe deviates, it creates a prominent bony knuckle on the inside of the foot.

This results in a wider than normal forefoot that can make buying footwear problematic – normal shoes often rub on the joint making it red, tender, or swollen.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I LEAVE IT?

This is a difficult question to answer because everyone is different. Some people find even small bunions painful, others have a severe deformity that does not give them any problems (other than trying to find suitable footwear!).

Generally, the condition tends to get progressively worse as time passes so if you notice a bunion forming it may be prudent to seek the advice of a podiatrist to see if this progress can be slowed.

The big toe plays an important role in walking and if your toe is not aligned as it should be this may affect the way you walk, putting pressure on other areas of your foot, or produce stiffness and pain. Other toes can become involved, and it is not unusual for the second toe to adopt a ‘hammered’ position as it tries to compensate for the reduced activity at the big toe.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

There are a number of potential causes of bunions. Genetics play a key role in determining who gets this condition – sufferers often report their mother or grandmother had them, for example. Ill-fitting or fashion footwear is a major exacerbating factor, particularly in women.

Other causes can include muscle imbalance in the foot, the natural shape of your big toe joint, arthritic changes, biomechanical stresses, or previous injury.

HOW CAN IT BE TREATED?

This is dependent on the cause, the severity of the deformity, and the discomfort or inconvenience it presents. A mild, pain-free deformity can be addressed (but not cured) through a prudent choice of footwear, and some simple toe exercises. If there is a biomechanical problem then orthotics may help.

In cases of more advanced, painful hallux valgus, or where the deformity is causing concerns from a cosmetic or footwear point of view, then a referral to a podiatric surgeon is indicated. Your podiatrist will advise you on the most appropriate option for your particular situation.

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.