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Hammertoe Surgery/Correction

If you have a hammertoe, you know how excruciating the symptoms can be. To help you find relief, Orthopedic Foot & Ankle Center can provide the treatment you need! Schedule an appointment with us today at one of our offices located throughout Greater Columbus!

What Is a Hammertoe?

A hammertoe is a common foot deformity that typically affects the second, third, and fourth toes. However, you can develop a hammertoe on the first (big toe) and 5th (baby toe) as well. It occurs when the toe's tendons and ligaments become too tight or too weak, causing the middle joint of the toe to bend upward instead of lying flat.

As a result of this muscle imbalance, the affected toe may rub against other toes or against the inside of the shoe, leading to discomfort. Beyond pain in patients with diabetes and/or with nerve damage, hammertoes can lead to wounds at the top or tip of the toe resulting in complications such as hospitalization and amputation.

Types of Hammertoes

There are 3 main types of hammertoes. They include the following:

1. Flexible hammertoes: A flexible hammertoe is still developing, so the affected toes still have the ability to move at the joint.
2. Semi-rigid hammertoes: The hammertoe has progressed and is starting to stiffen.
3. Rigid hammertoes: A rigid hammertoe can no longer move because now the tendon and soft tissues have tightened.

What Is Hammertoe Surgery?

Hammertoe surgery (also known as hammertoe correction) is an outpatient procedure that is used to straighten the toe joint that is stuck in a painful flexed position.

The type of surgery that you have will depend on how easily your toe can be straightened during your physical examination. There are several different surgical procedures that your foot and ankle surgeon can choose from to treat your hammertoe, including:

- Tendon transfer or tendon lengthening
- Joint resection
- Fusion

If there are any accompanying deformities of the forefoot your surgeon will review those ahead of time and if conservative care does not provide relief of your symptoms then the other deformities may need to be addressed at the time of surgery as well.

When Is Hammertoe Surgery Necessary?

Hammertoe surgery may be necessary if your body has not responded to the following nonsurgical techniques:

- Wearing shoes with extra room around the toes
- Over-the-counter splints and pads
- Exercises to help stretch and strengthen the muscles in your foot
- Taping and strapping

Would I Make a Good Candidate for Hammer Toe Surgery?

You may be a good candidate for hammer toe surgery if:

- Pain has significantly impacted your quality of life, making it difficult to participate in normal activities
- You cannot wear shoes comfortably
- You have multiple foot problems, including bunions, corns, etc., and your foot and ankle surgeon recommends treating all of them within the same operation
- Skin is breaking down from rubbing in your shoes or causing a pre-wound

You may not be a good candidate for this surgery if you have the following:

- An active infection
- A serious illness, such as heart disease
- Poor circulation
- An uncontrolled medical condition

How Can I Prepare for Hammer Toe Surgery?

You can prepare for hammer toe surgery by:

- Deciding whether you want the procedure to be performed under local anesthesia, twilight anesthesia, or general anesthesia.
- Scheduling enough time off from work so that you can make a full recovery.
- Arranging for someone to drive you home, especially if the surgery is going to be performed on your right foot.
- Making arrangements to have assistance with housework and other necessary activities.

What to Expect During Hammertoe Correction

You can expect not to have any pain during your surgery. There will be some discomfort after surgery however this is usually well tolerated as patients have dealt the pain in the toes for some time before surgery. Depending on the severity of your condition, your surgeon will perform one of the three following surgical procedures:

1. Tendon transfer- During this procedure, the tendon at the bottom of the toe will be transferred across the top of the joint. This changes your toe from being into the bent position into the straight position, improving the appearance and reducing discomfort.
2. Joint resection- During this procedure, your surgeon will cut specific ligaments and tendons to assist in straightening the joint. They may also remove a portion of your bone. To keep your toe straight and in place, your surgeon may insert temporary pins or implants.

3. Fusion- This surgery is recommended for severe cases where portions of the toe (tendons, ligaments, and the ends of the bone) will be removed. As with joint resection, your surgeon will use pins or implants to hold the joint in place and allow the bones to grow (fuse together). This can help reduce pain while at the same time straightening your toe.

Hammer Toe Surgery Recovery

The hammer toe surgery recovery time will vary from person to person. It is normal to have swelling. Typically, any stitches or temporary pins will be removed a few weeks after surgery. Depending on your procedure the internal pins or implants may remain in place long term.

Your doctor will recommend specific exercises for you to perform to help you improve your strength and heal. Post-operation instructions usually include:

- Possibly wearing a shoe insert or a special shoe to support your toe
- Avoiding putting weight on your foot which could be for a short time such as 24 hours or up to several weeks after the surgery
- Keeping your foot elevated
- Medications such as antibiotics, pain control, anti-coagulants
- Physical therapy

If you have a history of hammer toe, there is a possibility that it can develop again. To lower your risk and avoid other possible complications, it is imperative to wear comfortable footwear and follow all the instructions you receive to protect your toe during your recovery. With advancement in surgery techniques the recurrence rate of hammertoes has significantly decreased.

If you are searching for high-quality treatment in Greater Columbus, OH area, schedule an appointment at Orthopedic Foot & Ankle Center today! Our specialists are ready to give you the help you're looking for.

Sources:

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