

Removal of a Toe

What do I need to know?

Why remove a toe?

There are a number of reasons why removal of a toe surgery is needed. Mostly it is due to deformity of the toe particularly when the big toe has deviated significantly, as in the photograph (below). Sometimes surgical correction (straightening) of the toe(s) is not feasible. Sometimes, with severe deformity of the toe, the simplest option is to remove it. This allows for an early recovery after surgery, unlike surgical correction where the recovery from surgery can be prolonged.

Do I need an operation?

If your toe is troubled with recurring breakdown of the skin and/or infection then surgical removal of the toe may be recommended. If there is infection in the bone or joint, this can be difficult to eradicate this with antibiotics. In such instances we will discuss with you the possibility of removing the toe.



Picture above: Bunion with overlapping second toe

What happens after surgery?

You will be able to weight bear soon after your operation, but you will be very limited in walking for the first 2 weeks or so. The following is a guideline as to the expected recovery period:

- 1-2 weeks Bandage/rest/elevation (review in OPD clinic or GP nurse clinic)
- 2 weeks return to work/return to driving
- 6 weeks return to activities

What does the operation involve?

With removal of a toe surgery, incision is made at the base of the toe and the toe is removed. Sometimes the toe is removed completely; sometimes it is possible to remove only part of the toe. Then, the skin incision is stitched closed. The toe is covered with a dressing and a bandage and you will be given a sandal to wear home.

Anaesthetic

The operation is usually a day-case procedure. It is usually carried out under a local anaesthetic (you are awake, but your toe is completely numb). You will receive an appointment to attend the pre-operative assessment a week or two prior to your operation date. Occasionally, patients prefer to have the surgery performed under a general anaesthetic. This will be discussed with you at the pre-operative assessment clinic. You will receive more details about your anaesthetic in an information booklet **"You and your anaesthetic"** when you attend the PAC clinic. Further details can be obtained at <http://rcoa.ac.uk/patient-information>

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What are the benefits of removing a toe?

The reasons for performing surgery to remove a toe vary but the potential benefits from surgery include:

- A reduction in pain caused by deformity
- Avoidance of repeated skin breakdown/infection
- Eradication of infection that has developed in the bone (osteomyelitis)
- Easier shoe fitting

An improvement in these factors may also have a positive impact on your mobility and allow return to activities.

What are the risks?

Most people benefit from this procedure but there are no guarantees regarding the outcome of surgery. There are specific risks with this type of operation and the outcomes are not always as expected. These risks or complications have been detailed within this booklet and it is important that you read over these carefully before requesting an operation.

What are the alternatives to surgery?

1. Deformity

If your toe is deformed, surgery is rarely essential. If you decide not to have an operation for your toe deformity, the alternatives are for you to manage your symptoms by altering your activity levels and changing footwear to extra width or special footwear. Cushioning pads are very helpful. These simple measures can help to avoid an operation. You should avoid high heels and shoes with a narrow toe.

2. Infection

Removal of a toe is sometimes recommended especially if the reason for carrying out your surgery is infection. If you decide not to have an operation, it may be possible to manage your symptoms, potentially with long term antibiotics and continue to take advice from health professions.

Can I do nothing?

1. Deformity

In general, deformity of a toe is not a life or limb threatening condition and surgery is not essential. Surgery can be done at anytime and we can continue to monitor your symptoms. If your situation was to worsen you can always contact us to arrange a further discussion.

2. Infection

Infection can be serious; it can spread and potentially become a threat to your health. If the condition of your toe has deteriorated, it may be dangerous not to proceed with removal of your toe. This will very much depend on individual circumstances