



ORTHOPAEDIC SPECIALISTS
FOOT & ANKLE SERVICE

Rehabilitation Protocol
Bunion Surgery

What to expect after bunion surgery

The most common types of bunion surgery are 'scarf osteotomy' and 'chevron osteotomy'. Both are normally carried out as day case procedures while you are under a general anaesthetic. You'll also be given a local anaesthetic into the foot to reduce pain after the operation.

What does surgery involve?

Two tiny cuts (incisions) are made in the big toe, enabling it to be realigned while removing the excess bone. The metatarsal bone is then cut (osteotomy) and the bones are repositioned and held in place using tiny screws.

This leaflet will help you understand what to expect following treatment for bunions. However, everyone is different and your recovery may not be the same as others. **Please contact Mr Heidari if you are worried about any aspect of your recovery.**

Immediately after your operation

When you wake up your foot will be in a bandage to protect it and to help reduce the swelling. It may still be numb and pain free from the local anaesthetic given during your operation. However, if you do feel some pain or discomfort, it can be relieved by painkillers. A member of our physiotherapy team will help you to stand, supported by crutches, and will give you a tailored programme of exercises to help you walk correctly in a padded stiff shoe that supports your toe. This will allow you to put weight on the back/heel of your foot, while keeping weight off the front/ball of the foot where you have had surgery.

Most people can leave hospital the same day or the day after. This will depend on your general health, and how quickly you recover from the procedure.

The next day

- The block (local anaesthetic) will start to wear off so you may have more pain. You may be advised to start taking painkillers shortly after your operation to reduce this
- Try to rest your foot as much as possible. Keep it elevated (raised above the level of your heart) whenever possible



nh@os.clinic

Tel + 44 (0)20 3837 9923

Fax + 44 (0)20 8181 6676

www.londonfootandanklespecialist.co.uk

30 Devonshire St

London W1G 6PU



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- **Avoid smoking and taking anti-inflammatory medications as this may delay or even prevent the bones from fusing together**

Day 3-7

- Try to rest as much as possible, with your leg elevated above the level of your heart
- Whenever you put your foot down, it will swell and become sore
- It's normal to have some mild bruising
- By the end of the week, you should have significantly less pain

Day 7-14

- You should be starting to feel better, but try to keep your foot up as much as possible as this will reduce your pain
- You should be able to walk short distances at home, or to get in or out of a car, wearing the surgical sandal

Day 14-21

- During this time, you'll have a **follow-up appointment** arranged to have the bulky dressings removed and to discuss how you are getting on
- Your stitches will be removed
- You'll be fitted with a toe alignment splint, which you need to wear all the time until 6 weeks after the operation
- You'll still need to wear the surgical sandal
- We will give you some simple toe bending exercises to help prevent the big toe joint becoming stiff and painful scars developing. Carrying out these exercises regularly will help you to recover more quickly
- If surgery was on your left foot, you can usually start driving if you drive an automatic car if advised by Mr Heidari. However, you should also check with your car insurance provider
- You can shower without covering the wound

Day 21



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- Although some people may have scarring, moisturisers such as aloe vera, vitamin E or bio-oil can help to reduce this if they are applied around the wound. Once the wound is totally closed, these lotions may be applied over the wound
- It's safe to swim once the wound has dried up

Week 4-6

- In most cases, you'll be able to put weight on the foot in a normal shoe (although you may have to wear larger shoes, trainers or rubber 'croc' type shoes because your foot will still be swollen for up to 10 weeks)
- Although the bone won't have fully healed, you should be able to walk short distances without any problems

Week 6

- At this stage you'll have **another follow-up appointment**
- Although you'll be able to move your foot normally, it's still best to avoid walking long distances
- When you start to return to work, try to do this in phases, travelling outside of the rush hour if possible to start with.
- Try to keep your foot up as much as possible when you are sitting down
- You can begin low impact gym work such as the exercise bike or cross-trainer
- You should be OK to start driving a manual car, if advised by Mr Heidari, but it's a good idea to check with your car insurance company first
- You may be referred for physiotherapy if necessary

Week 12 onwards

- You should be able to walk normally
- Running, as well as other high impact exercise, can usually be started at 10-12 weeks
- You may be able to start wearing shoes with heels if you wish

Six months after surgery

- You'll have a **final review** with Mr Heidari 3-6 months after surgery
- There should be very little swelling



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Twelve months after surgery

- Healing should be complete

Exercises

Carrying out regular exercises after your bunion surgery is essential to prevent stiffness, restore your range of movement and help you get back to normal as quickly as possible. It's not possible to cause damage with these exercises, although stretching your toe may feel a little uncomfortable to begin with. However, the more regularly you carry out your exercises, the better the results will be.

In the first 2 weeks

You'll be advised to:

- Move your foot and ankle as much as possible. You may feel a stretch in your calf and/or front part of the foot while you are doing this
- Wriggle your toes as much as possible, even though you have a large dressing on them (you will not be damaging the toes by doing this)

Week 2-6

You'll be given exercises to help with mobility and strength, including:

- Placing your foot flat on the floor with some tissues nearby. Try to pick up a tissue from the floor by scrunching up all your toes (increasing the arch on the inside of the foot)
- Sitting with your legs straight out in front of you. Pull your foot and ankle up towards the shin feeling a stretch down the back of the calf

6-12 weeks after the operation

You should now aim to move the toes as much as possible, within the limits of your discomfort. You'll be advised to carry out exercises that help with strength, movement and balance, as well as helping to reduce scarring, including:

- Sitting on a chair: put your weight on the front part of the foot – bending the big toe at the joint. Once you can do this comfortably, start carrying out the exercise while standing
- Standing with one foot in front of the other with your hands against the wall. Bend the front knee keeping your foot straight and your heel on the ground. Lean towards the wall, putting your weight on the front leg. You should feel a stretch in the calf of your back leg. Keep the back knee straight



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- Scar massage – gently massage around the scar as much as possible. The scar may be sensitive and more painful in some areas; it is important to continue to desensitise the scar and prevent adhesions (tissues sticking together) forming. Try to do this for a few minutes at least twice a day



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