

Rehabilitation Protocol

Big Toe Fusion Surgery

What to expect after big toe fusion surgery (1st MTPJ fusion)

Big toe fusion surgery is carried out to straighten the joint(s) of the toe to treat big toe arthritis (*hallux rigidus*). This leaflet tells you what to expect as you recover from having big toe fusion surgery. However, everyone is different, and your recovery may be different from other people's. **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 which will need to stay on for around two weeks to protect it and to help reduce the swelling. It may still be numb from the local anaesthetic (block) given during your operation. However, if you do feel some pain or discomfort, this can be relieved by painkillers. When you have recovered from the anaesthetic, you'll be shown how to use crutches and walk using a surgical sandal. This will allow you to put weight on the back/heel of your foot so you can walk while keeping weight off the front/ball of the foot where you have had surgery.

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

The day after surgery

- You'll be able to walk using crutches to keep weight off the affected foot
- The block 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
- **You should avoid taking anti-inflammatory medications and smoking as these may delay or even prevent the bones from fusing together.**

Day 1-7

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

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Day 8-12

- You should be starting to feel better, but try to keep your foot elevated as much as possible as this will reduce your pain and swelling
- You should be able to walk short distances at home and get in or out of a car, using crutches and wearing the surgical sandal
- You may be able to return to work if this involves working from home but try to keep the foot elevated. If you have a heavy manual job, it will be up to three months before you can return to work

Day 12-16

- During this time, you will have a **follow-up appointment**, during which the bulky dressings are removed
- 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 and walk with crutches to maintain your balance and avoid putting weight on the front part of the foot
- 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

Day 21-28

- Any remaining dressings can be removed at home in the bath or shower
- Although some people may have scarring, applying moisturisers around the wound, such as aloe vera, vitamin E or bio-oil, can help to reduce this. Once the wound is completely healed, these lotions may be applied over the wound itself
- It's safe to swim once the wound has dried up
- 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 be swollen for up to 10 weeks)

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Week 6

- At this stage you will have another **follow-up appointment**
- You'll have an X-ray to check the bones are healing correctly
- 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 walking, using an exercise bike or cross-trainer
- You should be OK to start driving a manual car, if advised by Mr Heidari, but also check with your car insurance company
- You may be referred for physiotherapy if necessary

Week 12 onwards

- Your foot may continue to be swollen for up to a year following surgery
- Running, as well as other high impact exercise, can usually be started at 10-12 weeks. However, it can take six months to return to your normal sporting activity level

Six months after surgery

- You will have a **final review** with Mr Heidari sometime between 3-6 months after surgery

Twelve months after surgery

- Healing should be complete

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Exercises

Carrying out these regular exercises after your big toe fusion surgery is essential to prevent stiffness in the rest of the foot, restore your range of movement and help you return to your everyday activities as quickly as possible. It's not possible to cause damage to your foot by doing these exercises. 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:

- 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
- 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