

Bunions

What are Bunions?

A bunion is a bony, often painful, lump that can develop on the joint at the base of the big toe. This may force the foot bone attached to it (the first metatarsal) to stick out leading to the big toe pointing towards the toes of the same foot and in some cases, it can lead to an overlap between the big toe and the second toe. This change in direction leads to an increase in the size of the joint, and often the formation of an overlying bursa which may appear red and swollen.



What causes it?

There are several contributing factors as to what the cause of bunions may be. Wearing shoes that are too tight and don't fit properly is likely to make an existing bunion worse. Another cause can be a genetic pre-disposition to getting bunions, so if other members of your family have bunions, your risk of developing them is increased. However, this doesn't mean you'll necessarily develop them. A number of pre-existing conditions can also contribute to their development, arthritic conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, gout and psoriatic arthritis but also conditions associated with loose ligaments, flexible joints and low muscle tone could increase the likelihood of bunions developing.

What will happen if I leave it untreated?

The symptoms can sometimes get worse if the bunion is left untreated it is usually better to get at treatment as early as possible as if left untreated for too long the bunion could develop to the point where it would require surgery.

What can help?

Making sure you wear appropriately sized footwear is paramount, if there is enough width to the shoe, it will ease the rate of discomfort by not rubbing against the bunion. Shoes that are fastened with straps are often best for maximising width and comfort and where possible try to avoid wearing high heels as they are often tight fitting and will limit the amount of support.

The golden rule is to make sure that your shoes are the correct size and that there's enough room to move your toes freely.

What are the treatment options?

There are several treatments available, though it is preferable to first try out non-surgical treatment, if it is necessary surgery is available. Often, if your bunion is painful, over-the-counter painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen may first be recommended but options such as Bunion pads may also ease the pain.

Orthotics can also often provide complete relief by offering more stability around the joint. They can't reverse any damage done to the bone structure, but for many people they can achieve pain free walking when used in appropriate footwear.