

Hammertoes

What is a hammertoe?

A hammertoe is an abnormal positioning of the lesser toes. This is typically a flexing of the toe joints in a down position with an upward extension of the joint where the toe attaches to the foot. The toes often sit up off the floor and cause increased pressure on the ball of the foot. The knuckles may also rub on shoes. The bent knuckles can also press against one another and cause pain. Hammertoes can also press the tip of the toe against the ground and cause painful calluses or open sores. These deformities are typically caused by muscle imbalances in the foot, but can also be related to injury or nerve problems.

What can be done to treat hammertoes?

Conservative treatment options include:

1. Toe spacers to keep the toes apart
2. Foam or silicone sleeves to protect the toe
3. A "crest pad" which sits under the toes to keep them from pressing against the ground
4. Trimming down painful calluses which may form
5. Wearing shoes with extra depth and width in the toe box to accommodate the change in shape of the toes

These options are best for patients with poor circulation or those with mild deformities.

Surgical options include:

1. Minimally invasive straightening in the office
2. Removal of half of the knuckle (arthroplasty)
3. Removal of the entire knuckle and fusion of the toe bones (arthrodesis)
4. Release or repair of the tight foot joint holding the toe upward in an extended position
5. Use of pins, screws, or implants to hold the toe straight

What is hammertoe surgery like?

The minimally invasive procedure which Dr. Walimire performs in the office is performed through a needle stick incision on the bottom of the toe. This procedure releases the tight tendon which causes the toe to flex. There is minimal pain from this procedure

and most activity can be performed the next day. Multiple toes can be corrected simultaneously as long as they are on the same foot.

Surgery in the operating room is done for moderate to severe deformities and is done through a small incision on the top of the toe. The best procedure for long term success in maintaining proper position of the toes is to fuse them so they no longer bend. This helps to keep them permanently stable, so they no longer cause problems. Patients are typically back in to normal shoes 4 – 6 weeks after surgery once the swelling subsides. Prolonged swelling of the toes may last for up to 6 months after surgery but this is typically not painful and does not cause problems.

