

Hallux Rigidus

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What is it?

- Hallux rigidus is essentially arthritis leading to stiffness and pain in the big toe joint [first MTP joint].
- Loss of cartilage associated with the top half of this joint occurs due to repetitive jamming as the big toe joint attempts to move upward with each step.
- Hallux rigidus takes many years to develop, but can become quite symptomatic.

Hallux Rigidus

(Arthritis Great toe joint)



Great Toe Bone Spur (viewed form the side)



What are the symptoms of Hallux Rigidus?

Patients with hallux rigidus will often present with:

- Pain and swelling in the great toe joint
- Bone spurs (causing swelling) on the top half of the big toe joint
- Symptoms that are aggravated by excessive repetitive upward movement of the big toe joint such as prolonged walking

Non-Operative Treatment

Hallux rigidus can be successfully treated non-operatively in most patients. The central principle of non-operative treatment is to decrease the inflammation in the arthritic joint by limiting the motion through this joint. Successful non-operative management may include:

- Limiting the great toe motion with a stiff rocker soled shoe or an orthotic with a carbon fiber insert such as the recommendation below
- Comfort shoe with a wide toe box to limit the irritation to the great toe
- Anti-inflammatory medications (oral or topical) may help decrease pain
- Injection of corticosteroids into the great toe joint may provide some limited short-term improvement in symptoms



Operative Treatment

When non-operative treatment is unsuccessful there are operative options that may be helpful

- Cheilectomy. A cheilectomy may be performed to remove the prominent bone spurs on the top of the great toe and improve the motion in the joint. This can be a successful procedure for patients with mild to moderate hallux rigidus but does not stop the progression of the cartilage loss.
- Great toe fusion. This can be a very successful procedure for patients with moderate to severe hallux rigidus. Patients will be limited in their ability to use high heeled shoes. However, patients already have very limited motion in the great toe so the loss of toe motion is usually not an issue and the pain relief can be dramatic.
- Great toe partial joint replacements (hemiarthroplasty). A “half a joint replacement” that places an implant plug made of polyvinyl alcohol in the first metatarsal head has become more common and may work well in certain patients.
- Great toe metal joint replacement (1st MTP joint arthroplasty). A complete joint replacement can maintain motion and provide pain relief but can be very problematic when the joint replacement fails. Silicone joint replacements are now avoided because of their high failure rates.