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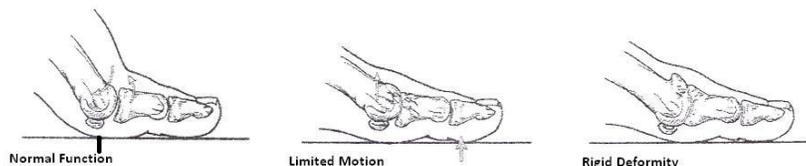
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Hallux Rigidus

Hallux rigidus is a disorder of the joint located at the base of the big toe. It causes pain and stiffness in the big toe, and with time it gets increasingly harder to bend the toe. "Hallux" refers to the big toe, while "rigidus" indicates that the toe is rigid and cannot move. Hallux rigidus is actually a form of degenerative arthritis (a wearing out of the cartilage within the joint that occurs in the foot and other parts of the body).

Because hallux rigidus is a progressive condition, the toe's motion decreases as time goes on. In its earlier stage, motion of the big toe is only somewhat limited—at that point, the condition is called "hallux limitus." But as the problem advances, the toe's range of motion gradually decreases until it potentially reaches the end stage of "rigidus"—where the big toe becomes stiff, or what is sometimes called a "frozen joint." Other problems are also likely to occur as the disorder progresses.



What Causes Hallux Rigidus? Common causes of hallux rigidus are faulty function (biomechanics) and structural abnormalities of the foot that can lead to osteoarthritis in the big toe joint. This type of arthritis—the kind that results from "wear and tear"—often develops in people who have defects that change the way their foot and big toe functions. For example, those with fallen arches or excessive pronation (rolling in) of the ankles are susceptible to developing hallux rigidus.

In some people, hallux rigidus runs in the family and is a result of inheriting a foot type that is prone to developing this condition. In other cases, it is associated with overuse—especially among people engaged in activities or jobs that increase the stress on the big toe, such as workers who often have to stoop or squat. Hallux rigidus can also result from an injury—even from stubbing your toe.

Treatment: Non-Surgical Approaches

Shoe modifications. Shoes that have a large toe box should be worn, because they put less pressure on your toe. Stiff or rocker-bottom soles may also be recommended. Most likely, you'll have to stop wearing high heels.

Orthotic devices. Custom orthotic devices may improve the function of your foot.

Medications. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, may be prescribed to help reduce pain and inflammation. Supplements such as glucosamine-chondroitin sulfate and some vitamins and minerals may also be helpful.

Injection therapy. Injections of corticosteroids in small amounts are sometimes given in the affected toe to help reduce the inflammation and pain.

Physical therapy. Ultrasound therapy or other physical therapy modalities may be undertaken to provide temporary relief.

When is Surgery Needed?

In some cases, surgery is the only way to eliminate or reduce pain. There are several types of surgery that can be undertaken to treat hallux rigidus. The procedure that is used to correct hallux rigidus depends on many factors, including the cause of the condition and the severity, as well as the patient's age, occupation and activity level.

