


A close-up, low-angle shot of a person's feet wearing orange and black running shoes. The shoes are stepping on a wet, leaf-covered ground, with water splashing around the soles. The background is a bright, hazy sky, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall mood is active and fresh.

TOE FUSION SURGERY:
WHAT TO EXPECT

A photograph of a man and a woman walking together in a field, both with their arms raised in a gesture of joy or freedom. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter. The man is on the right, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt and dark pants. The woman is on the left, wearing a light-colored long-sleeved top and light-colored pants. They are both smiling and looking towards the camera.

Your toes may be small, but they have an important job to do. They help you keep your balance, shift your weight around in subtle ways, and let you get around. Each toe plays an important role in your overall mobility. Which means that when something goes wrong—even with one of your smaller toes—you tend to feel it throughout the rest of your body.

There are several common toe deformities that can occur for a variety of reasons. Each of these deformities can cause pain, discomfort, and make it hard to walk. The most effective treatment for these toe deformities is often a procedure called toe fusion surgery.

When performed successfully, toe fusion surgery can effectively straighten your deformed toe—and keep the deformity from returning. This keeps your toe straight, minimizing pain and improving your overall mobility. For this reason, toe fusion surgery is a common—and widely successful—treatment for toe deformities.



What Does Toe Fusion Surgery Address?

Toe fusion surgery can be successfully used to address a wide range of toe issues. For most patients, toe fusion surgery is used to address one or more of the following:

- **HAMMER TOE:** In those with this condition, one or more of your toes are bent inwards (pushing the second toe up in the process). Hammertoe is often caused at least in part by a foot injury or by wearing shoes that are too tight and narrow.
- **MALLET TOE:** Mallet toe and hammer toe often occur at the same time, though they do not have to. Mallet toes are those that are turned at an odd angle. They may be painful to move and have calluses or corns on them.
- **CLAW TOE:** This occurs when the toes are bent into a claw shape. They are bent upwards at the base of the toe and downwards at the middle of the toe.

If you can address any of these toe deformities quickly, you may be able to avoid surgery or try more conservative treatments. However, when toes become permanently stuck in these deformed positions, surgery may be the best treatment option.

Because the toes play a critical role in maintaining your overall balance, toe deformities can significantly impact your mobility. This makes it hard to get around or engage in any of your favorite activities.

Toe fusion surgery can address these issues by removing the joint and fusing the toe bones together. This decreases the pain associated with the deformity and allows you to engage in your favorite daily activities without pain (and with only a minimal loss in toe agility).



What Should I Expect from Toe Fusion Surgery?

You and your orthopedic specialist will discuss your toe surgery well before you go under or schedule your procedure. In some cases, non surgical treatments may be tried before surgery.

Toe fusion surgery is most often performed on an outpatient basis. For most patients, then, your day will consist of arriving at your appointment, undergoing the procedure, and returning home the same day.

What Happens During Toe Fusion Surgery?

Toe fusion surgery can be performed under general or local anesthesia. Before your surgery begins, you and your surgeon will discuss which option is most suited for your preferences and your surgical needs.

During your toe fusion surgery, your surgeon will make a small incision along the impacted toe or toes. Once the incision is made, cartilage and bone material will be removed, along with any ligaments and tendons necessary. Once that occurs, your toe bones will be placed in a corrected position.

Once surgeons are confident in the new position of your toes, metal screws and, possibly, a metal plate will be used to secure your toe. This ensures your toe will remain static in that same position. Once the toes are successfully fused, the incision will be closed with sutures. The entire surgery usually takes somewhere between 45-60 minutes, depending on the needs of the patient.

After your incision is closed, you will be taken to a recovery room where you will wait for the anesthesia to wear off. Patients will need to arrange a ride home, as they will not be able to safely drive.



What to Expect from Toe Fusion Recovery

Many prospective patients want to know how long toe fusion recovery takes, but the answer depends on the nature of your condition and the extent of your treatment. In most cases, however, patients can expect to be back to many daily activities, such as going to work, in 2-4 weeks. Most pain and swelling should recede after about six weeks, but some minor pain and swelling can persist for up to six months.

Every patient will go over their recovery instructions before surgery begins, so you will have a clear idea of what to expect when it comes to what you can and cannot do. In most cases, patients can expect the following during their recovery:

- Once your surgery is complete, you may be required to wear a special boot or bandage in order to protect your toe and ensure it heals properly.
- Depending on the nature of your fusion surgery, you will likely be given crutches to use for at least several days after your procedure.
- You should talk to your surgeon before you shower. However, in general you should be able to shower after your toe fusion surgery as long as you can keep your bandage (or boot) dry.
- Most people are able to start walking after 2-3 weeks of recovery. However, you should avoid vigorous activity (and any heavy lifting) for at least a couple of months after your procedure.
- Your doctor may recommend or require physical therapy in order to help your toe heal as rapidly and successfully as possible.
- If possible, you should quit smoking before your procedure begins. Smoking can inhibit the normal healing process. This can prolong your recovery and make it less likely that your bones will fuse together.



Your surgeon will provide you with detailed recovery instructions. During pre-operative meetings, you will be able to discuss the medication you're on and whether any of those medications will need to be paused. If medications are paused, your doctor will give you the go-ahead to start them again.

You will also meet with your surgeon 1-2 weeks after your surgery to ensure everything is healing properly. It's essential to make sure you are staying on top of follow-up care.



What Will Be Different After My Toe Fusion Surgery?

For most people, toe fusion surgery will return a significant amount of mobility to your daily life. But it's important to note that many patients may experience a loss of flexibility in their toes. This is because the joint will now be missing. This can limit some activities. For example, you may not be able to wear high-heeled shoes any longer because your toes may not flex in the correct way.

However, you should be able to do most everyday activities. Once you're fully healed, you'll be able to go on walks with your dog, jog around the local park, or engage in a wide variety of athletic activities. Best of all, your pain will be significantly minimized after your surgery—so you will be able to enjoy those activities even more.

If you have questions about your toe fusion surgery, talk to your provider today. You can ask them about having your toe surgery performed at an ambulatory surgery center, so you can avoid the hospital all together.

Toe fusion surgery can help you get back the mobility you've been missing!





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