

Hallux Rigidus ("Stiff Big Toe")



General Information

Hallux Rigidus, "stiff big toe," is a commonly occurring condition of degenerative arthritis (a wearing out of surfaces) affecting the MTP joint, the large joint at the base of the great (big) toe, the hallux. The condition results over time from constant wear and stress or from an injury to the joint. The result of the condition is pain, swelling, and/or restriction of movement; eventually the patient will stop bending the joint when transferring weight to the other foot, as in walking or running. Women will probably have to stop wearing shoes with high heels.

Causes of Hallux Rigidus?

In most cases, there is no definite cause of this condition. Because of the tremendous stress put on this small joint over time (a force equal to twice one's body weight), eventually the joint simply begins to wear out. It can affect fairly young people, even as young as teenagers.

Hallux rigidus can also result from an injury or as a complication of another medical condition, such as gout or infection. It can also result from mechanical or anatomical problems in the foot and ankle, excessive pronation (rolling in) of the ankles, as well as toe deformities, which increase the stress on the joint.

Symptoms of Hallux Rigidus?

Two problems result from Hallux rigidus: pain and stiffness (loss of motion). Walking is painful and difficult, since the MTP joint cannot move enough to allow the foot to "roll through" while walking.



Treatment

As a form of degenerative arthritis, treatment begins with anti-inflammatory medication. Other conservative treatments include:

- Special shoes that reduce the amount of bend in the toe while walking or thick-soled shoes
- Shoes with a larger toe box
- Rest and ice
- Use of a toe spacer between the great and second toe
- Stretching of the foot
- Avoid high heels
- Watch your weight

When conservative treatments fail, surgery may be suggested. There are several types of surgical procedures, including arthroplasty and or the replacement of the MTP with an artificial joint and fusion of the joint.