



Hallux Valgus (Bunions)

Information for patients
Podiatry



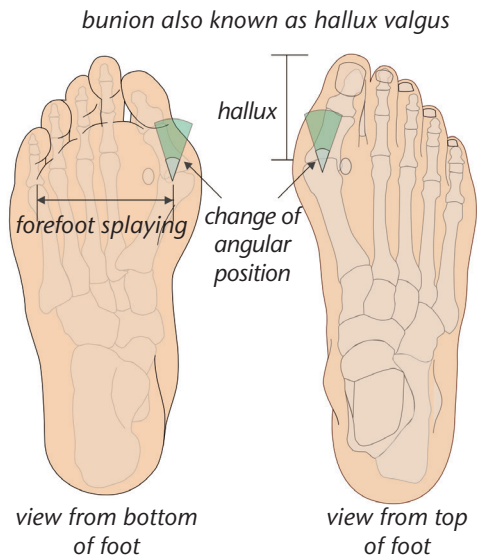
Hallux valgus or bunions is the most common condition affecting the fore foot in adults. It affects around one in five adults and is more common in women than men. It may affect one or even both of your feet. Usually one foot is affected worse than the other.

WHAT IS HALLUX VALGUS?

Hallux valgus is a deformity which causes a bony lump to develop on the inside of your foot at the big toe joint better known as a bunion. The formation of a bunion can increase the stress on the tendons causing your big toe to deviate towards the second toe.

Many people who have bunions have no pain and require no treatment, however some can develop significant pain and deformity. In both cases finding comfortable footwear can be a problem depending on the severity of the bunion.

The bunion can make your foot wider, making your footwear tighter. Tight fitting footwear will cause rubbing and friction over the bunion causing the skin to become red and swollen. In some cases the skin can thicken or even blister. A small fluid filled sack called a bursa may develop over the bunion which can be inflamed, swollen and painful. The severity of the pain will depend on how much pressure there is from your footwear. A bursa develops as a means of protection and shock absorption to a particular area that is having a lot of stress and pressure applied to it.



Classic signs and symptoms:

- ❖ Bony lump on the inside of the big toe joint
- ❖ Deviation of the big toe towards the second toe
- ❖ Pain, stiffness and swelling of the big toe joint
- ❖ Inflamed, swollen or hard skin over the bunion
- ❖ Difficulty in finding footwear that fits comfortably
- ❖ Deformity of the smaller toes

WHAT CAUSES HALLUX VALGUS?

Although hallux valgus a very common condition the cause is unknown. It is believed that inherited factors (runs in the family), the shape of the bones in your feet and footwear are well known causes. Ill fitting footwear can cause your bunions to be more uncomfortable and may increase the risk of developing problems in the future.

Other contributing factors

- ❖ Previous injuries/trauma to your toe joints
- ❖ Hypermobility/flexible joints
- ❖ Age
- ❖ Inflammatory arthritic conditions (Rheumatoid Arthritis, Psoriatic Arthritis, etc.)
- ❖ Tightness in the muscles in the back your leg
- ❖ Neuromuscular conditions (Stroke, Cerebral Palsy, Multiple Sclerosis, hereditary motor and sensory neuropathy, etc.)
- ❖ Certain activities that place increased stress through your big joint (walking, running, sporting activity etc.)

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

Your pain should start to improve by following the advice that is aimed at reducing the pressures around the deformity. These self-help measures will not correct or reduce the size or shape of the deformity.

It is important to note that if you have any of the above contributing factors you will need to consider making the necessary changes to your lifestyle to help aid your recovery.

The one person who can help you get better is you!

WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

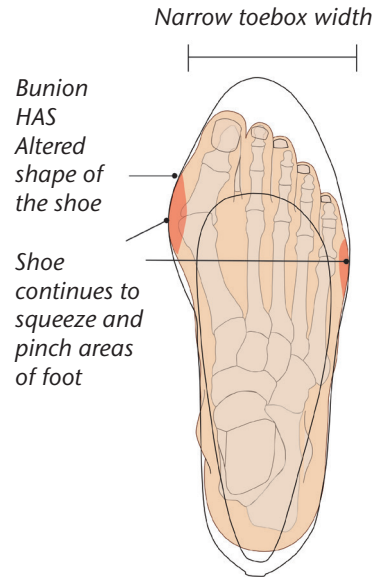


Increased weight will place extra stress on your joints and soft tissues in your feet. Losing even a small amount of weight will make a big difference to this especially when walking, running, or going up and downstairs.

If you need help with weight-control, you can find information, advice and groups you can join to help you manage your weight better. To access the NHS BMI Calculator go to: www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator/ or otherwise open your camera on your smartphone or tablet and hold it up to the code and the link should appear on your screen, press this link and you'll be taken to this web address. This guide will help you on whether you should consider weight management.

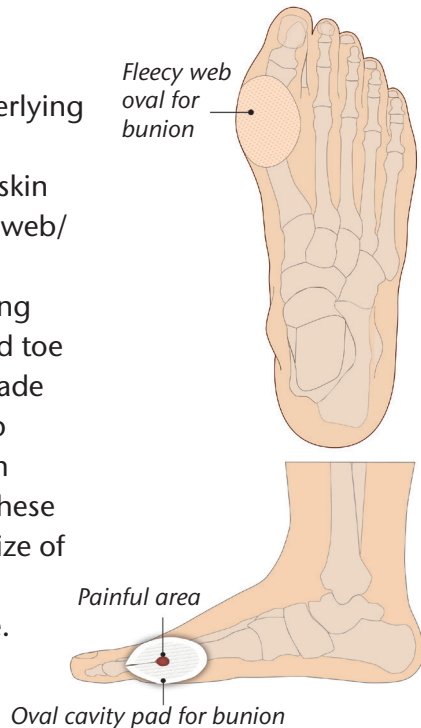
FOOTWEAR

It is important that you choose footwear that is wide and deep enough to accommodate the bunion and any lesser toe deformities. It can also be useful to choose a shoe with a softer material on the upper/top section around the lacing area. Softer materials can mould around the deformity easier than hard patent leathers. If your shoe is too narrow it will rub on the bunion causing the surrounding skin to become red, swollen and in some cases thicken or blister.



PADDING

If you find that the skin or bursa overlying the bunion is inflamed or blistered, cover the area with a plaster (if the skin is broken) or some padding (fleecy web/ semi compressed felt) if not. Some people also find benefit from wearing bunion pads, bunion protectors and toe separators. These devices can be made from various materials and can help to reduce pressure and friction from footwear rubbing on the bunion. These devices will not alter the shape or size of the bunion and can be bought from your local pharmacy or online.



PAIN MANAGEMENT

Pain medication can help reduce your symptoms, allowing you to move more comfortably which will aid your recovery. Your community Pharmacist can provide painful area guidance on specific medication or other methods of pain relief (always read the label and manufacturer's guidelines).

ICE

If the big toe joint or surrounding skin is inflamed, swollen and painful, apply some ice in a damp towel to the area and hold it for 20 minutes every hour until your symptoms have improved.

You could try sports sprays and gel/cool packs, which do a similar job. You can do this every two to three hours.

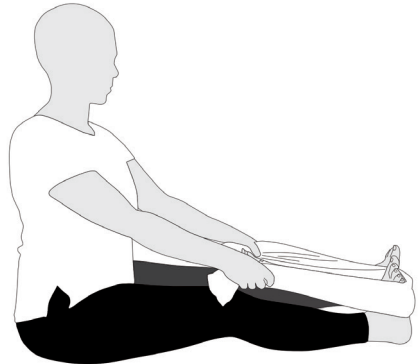
STRENGTHENING AND STRETCHING EXERCISES

Exercises can help to reduce the tightness in the muscles in the back of your leg and improve the flexibility in the foot and ankle.

1. Calf towel stretch

This exercise is designed to stretch the muscles in the back of your leg.

Start by placing a towel around the ball of the painful foot keeping your heel in contact with the ground and avoid bending your knee.



Pull the towel towards you until you feel a stretch along the bottom of your foot and the calf muscles in the back of your leg.

Hold the stretch for 30 seconds and repeat three times with a small period of rest in between stretches.

It is particularly useful to perform this stretch first thing in the morning and after periods of rest.

If you feel this stretching exercise is making your pain worse then focus on the strengthening exercises.

2. Standing Calf stretch

This exercise is done in two parts.

First support yourself by placing both hands shoulder height and width apart against the wall. Once supported take a step back with your painful foot. Make sure your heels are in contact with the ground and remain like this throughout this exercise with both feet also pointing forwards towards the wall.

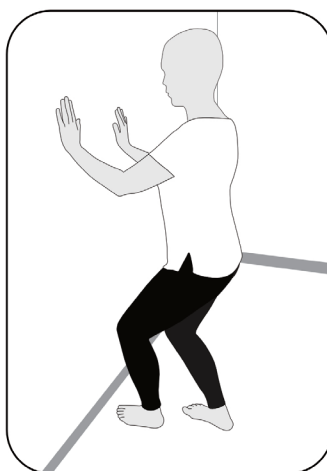
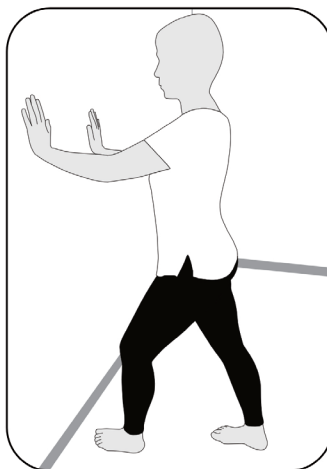
Now slowly begin to bend your front knee whilst moving your upper body towards the wall until you feel a stretch in the calf muscles in the back of your leg.

Hold the stretch for 20 seconds and repeat three times with a small period of rest in between stretches.

The second part of this exercise is designed to stretch the soleus muscle which is one of your calf muscles. Starting in the same position as before slide your painful foot towards the front foot as being demonstrated. Now when bending the front knee also bend the knee of the back leg until you feel a deeper stretch in the calf muscle. Like the other stretches make sure your heel is in contact with the ground throughout the exercise.

Hold this stretch for 20 seconds and repeat three times.

If you feel this stretching exercise is making your pain worse then please focus on the strengthening exercises.

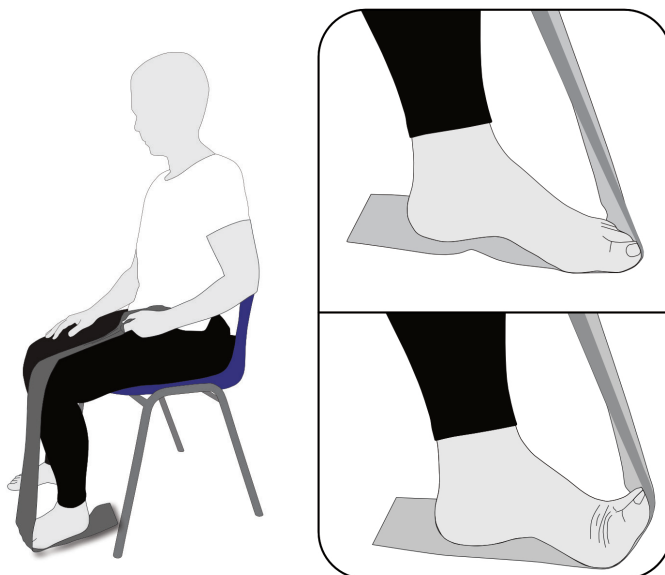


3. Intrinsic foot exercises (Theraband)

This exercise is designed to strengthen the small muscles in the foot. This exercise is performed in a seated position making sure your back is straight and leg bend comfortably at 90 degrees with your painful foot placed on a strip of Theraband.

Pull the end of the Theraband over your knee towards you which in turn will pull your toes up into a flexed position. Anchor the band on your thigh maintaining a good level of tension throughout the exercise. Hold the band tight and begin to slowly push your toes down towards the ground against the resistance of the band. When your toes reach the ground allow them to slowly raise back to their starting position.

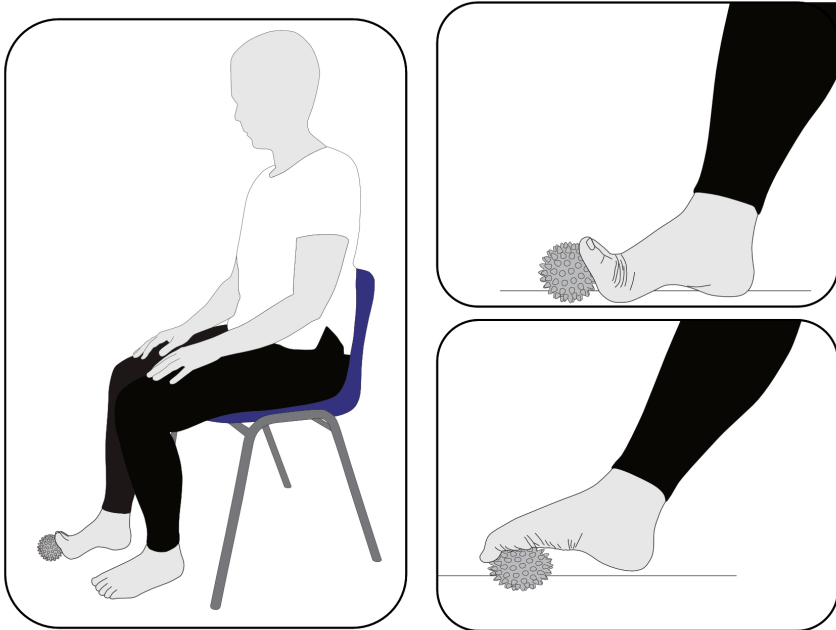
You are aiming to do three sets of around 10-15 repetitions. You can adjust the difficulty of the exercise by creating more or less tension on the Theraband. Make sure your heel stays in contact with the ground throughout the exercise.



4. Foot arch exercise

This exercise is designed to strengthen the muscles in the arch of the foot.

Sitting comfortably in a chair, flex your toes against the friction ball with your heel and ball of the foot placed on the ground.



Slowly lift your heel and start to roll the ball under your toes. Your toes must continue to stay in contact with the ball at all times. Hold this position for three seconds and then slowly roll the ball backwards to bring the foot back to its starting position. When rolling the ball back make sure your heel touches the ground first before the ball of the foot.

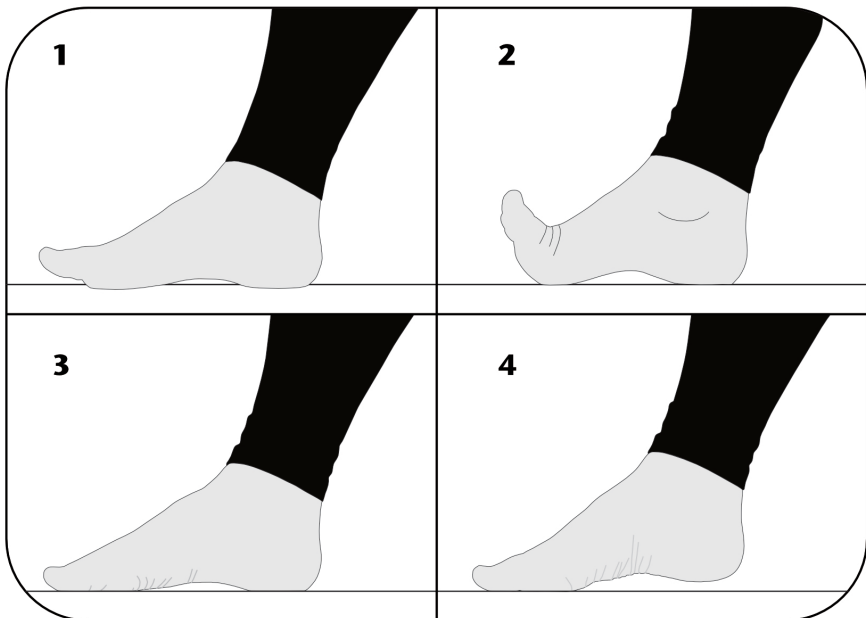
You should be able to feel the effects of this exercise in the arch of your foot and the muscles in the back of your leg.

5. Toe motion exercise

This exercise is designed to strengthen the small muscles in your foot and can be done with or without footwear.

In a seated position place your heel and ball of the foot on the ground and lift your toes towards you holding this for five seconds. Slowly bring your toes back down to the ground. Now with the tips of your toes grip the ground and slowly lift your heel up very slightly. Hold this position for five seconds. Relax and bring the toes back towards holding again for five seconds. Continue to work between these two positions for 10 repetitions.

If you experience some cramping in your foot when doing this exercise you should reduce the number of repetitions.



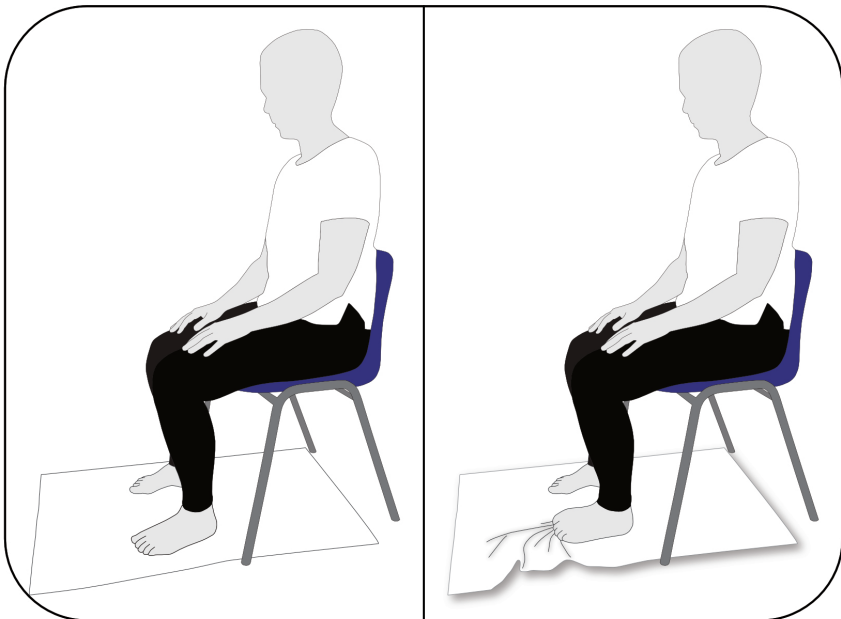
6. Intrinsic towel strengthening

This exercise is designed to strengthen the small muscles in your foot.

Start by placing a small towel flat on the ground. This exercise is performed in a seated position making sure your back is straight and legs bent comfortably at 90 degrees.

Place your painful foot on top of the towel and using your toes start scrunching the towel so that it is being pulled towards you. Do this in a slow controlled manner, making sure your heel remains in contact with the ground throughout this exercise.

When you have pulled the towel in as far as possible, flatten it back out and repeat the process between three and five times.



Patience

Have patience. Your symptoms should start to improve within three months of following this advice.

What else can be done?

The good news is that your pain should start to improve once you start following the above advice.

If you have any concerns that you are getting worse or notice any changes in the shape of your foot please contact your local MSK Podiatrist or email **PodiatryMSK@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk**.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The information below will answer many of the questions you may have in the early part of your treatment. We aim to ensure your specific needs are considered throughout.

A shared decision making process is used by our teams. This means you will be informed about the treatment options open to you the risks and benefits of each option. You will be supported to make a choice about which treatment best meets your needs.

We hope the following questions that have been developed on the back of MSK focus groups, will provide you with some answers and information around your condition.

What is wrong? Why? What is the cause?

Hallux valgus is a deformity causing a bony lump to develop on the inside of the foot at the big toe joint. The exact cause is unknown, but it is believed that inherited factors (runs in the family), the shape of the bones in the feet and footwear are well known causes.

What is the possible impact on my health and function?

Many people who have bunions have no pain and require no treatment, however some can develop significant pain and deformity. In both cases finding comfortable footwear can be a problem depending on the severity of the bunion.

Tight fitting shoes can cause the bony lump to rub which can result in your skin becoming red and swollen and in some cases the skin can thicken or blister. Sometimes a fluid filled sac called a bursa can develop over the bony lump which can become inflamed and painful.

Will I get better or worse?

The good news is that your pain should start to improve by following the above advice that is aimed at reducing the pressures from around the deformity. These measures will not correct or reduce the size or shape of the deformity.

If you have any concerns that you are getting worse or notice any changes in the shape of your foot please contact your local MSK Podiatrist or email **PodiatryMSK@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk**.

Is it curable?

Unfortunately there is no quick or easy fix. Your pain should decrease by following the above advice.. These conservative measures will not correct or reduce the size or shape of the bunion. It is important to note that if you have any of the contributing factors you will need to consider making the necessary changes to your lifestyle to help aid your recovery.

The one person who can help you get better is you!

How long will it take to get better?

Your symptoms should start to improve within three months of following this advice.

What are you (the health professional) able to do about my problem?

By using our self-help tool, we would like to help you to better understand your condition and provide you with the tools which should help support your recovery.

What is the treatment that is most appropriate for me?

Treatment protocols for Hallux Valgus always start with basic principles and we would encourage you to consider trying some self-help treatment in the first instance before making a referral to your local Podiatry department.

What can I do to help myself to alleviate it?

We would encourage you consider trying some self-help treatment in the first instance before making a self referral to your local Podiatry department.

If you have severe sudden foot pain or have had an episode of trauma we would advise that you seek medical treatment straight away. If you have developed a new lump or bump or there has been a change in a preexisting one contact your GP as soon as possible.

Should, after trying the self help treatment, you need to see a Podiatrist, please refer yourself to the local local Health Centre or complete the following referral form and send to **PodiatryMSK@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk**

Why am I not improving? Where have I gone wrong? Am I doing the right things?

There could be a number of reasons why your symptoms may not be improving. If you have followed the self-help advice for three months and your pain has not started to improve please contact your local MSK Podiatrist or email **PodiatryMSK@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk**.

How can I maintain my function and do the things I want to and need to do?

If you are in pain do not try and do all your normal daily activities such as housework, at once. Break the harder jobs down into smaller jobs and do something gentler in between. Extensive walking or standing should be avoided if it aggravates your pain. It is recommended that you modify activities rather than to fully stop all forms of movement or exercise. Work out what you can do relatively pain free and use that as a starting point. Then over time build up your activity. Track and write down your progress to keep you motivated.

What activities can I do and how should I adapt them

(e.g. sports, work)?

Avoid high impact activities like running which will significantly increase load through the big toe joint. We would encourage you to take part in low impact activities like walking, swimming, cycling etc. until the pain is at a manageable level.

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NHS Lanarkshire General
Enquiry Line: 0300 30 30 243

NHS inform - The national health information service for Scotland.

www.nhsinform.co.uk
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