

Bunions are also known as Hallux Valgus. Hallux is the Latin word for the great toe, and Valgus is Latin for 'bending outwards'. Hallux Valgus is therefore an unnatural, bony hump (deformity) that forms at the base of the big toe where it attaches to the foot. The big toe bends away from the midline, towards the second toe and other toes.

A bunion occurs at a joint, where the toe bends in normal walking. Your entire body weight rests on the bunion with each step. Bunions are vulnerable to excess pressure and friction from shoes and this can lead to the development of calluses. Bunions can be extremely painful and are often aggravated by wearing shoes which do not properly support the forefoot.

## What causes bunions?

Bunions are more common in women. They can occur more commonly in families where other family members have had a bunion (genetic). A flat foot can also contribute to the development of this condition.

## Why does the big toe bend out?

The joint between the big toe and the forefoot is the joint which is affected by a bunion. The first bone after the big toe in the foot is called the 'first metatarsal'. The metatarsal bone might be more mobile and slightly rotated in some people, and as they get older it can become more and more rotated as the ligament pulls the big toe out of alignment.

## Surgical Treatment for Hallux Valgus

There are a number of surgical procedures for bunions. The most common is an operation called 'First Metatarsal Osteotomy'. This involves cutting of the bone so that the big toe can be straightened.

The surgery takes approximately 45-60 minutes under a general anaesthetic.

Other incisions may be used to correct severe deformity. A plaster cast is not usually required, although you may need a special shoe.

## How long will I be in hospital?

You will usually only need to stay in hospital for one day. If your circumstances or condition require a more complex operation, this stay may be longer. Your surgeon will discuss this with you at the time of booking your operation.

## When you go home following surgery

You will need to rest with your foot well elevated for the first two weeks. You may need to take regular pain relief and a prescription should be given to you before you are discharged home.

It is normal to experience some swelling and discomfort for several weeks after your surgery. The swelling can become worse if you stand or walk for a long period of time.

For the first few weeks you will normally be allowed to take some weight through your shoe, walking with the assistance of crutches.

## How long will I be off work?

You will not be able to drive a car following surgery. This may affect your ability to return to work. You can expect to be off work for approximately six weeks. It will depend upon the type of work you do. If you are able to sit all day at work you may be able to return a little earlier. If your work involves you walking or standing it may be longer.

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## When should I seek help?

Phone immediately (Wellington Orthopaedic clinic / Kenepuru Outpatients during clinic hours or Emergency Dept if after hours) if you have:

- increasing pain or discomfort which is not controlled by pain medication or elevation
- numbness or tingling in your toe or foot
- you feel hot and feverish, unwell, or you notice redness or inflammation around your foot

## Follow-up appointments

You may need to attend an appointment with your specialist two weeks following your surgery. At this appointment you may have your sutures removed and the cast (if used) changed. Depending on the type of operation you had an x-ray may also be arranged.

It is important that you return for your follow-up appointments. You will be given an Orthopaedic clinic appointment where your progress is reviewed. This may be followed up with several appointments before you are discharged from the clinic.

### Contact us:

**Remember** If you do not have an appointment, always phone before coming to Orthopaedic clinic.

#### Wellington Hospital Orthopaedic Clinic

Phone (04) 385 5952 Fax (04) 385 5953

**Hours of opening:** Monday – Friday (including Public Holidays) 8am -9.30pm.  
Sat & Sunday 9am -5.30pm

**Outside of these hours** please contact the Wellington Hospital Emergency Department  
Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 5432

#### Kenepuru Hospital Outpatients

Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 7205

**Hours of opening:** Monday – Friday (excluding Public Holidays) 8am - 4.30pm.

**Outside of these hours** please contact the Wellington Orthopaedic Clinic on (04) 385 5954. If they are closed contact the Wellington Hospital Emergency Department on (04) 385 5999 Ext 5432

### Can't keep your outpatient appointment?

Please phone us on 0800 999 442 and let us know as soon as possible.