

Dr. David A. Lieb, D.P.M.
Board Certified Foot Surgeon: A.C.C.P.P.S.
Fellow: American Society of Podiatric Dermatology
Fellow: American Wound Care Association
Family Foot Care
1 0 Hillcrest Drive, Suite #25
Frederick, MD. 21703
(301) 695-1010
E Mail: Afamilyfootcare@aol.com

Do You Have a Painful Bump of the Top of Your Big Toe?

Hallux limitus (limited motion of the "hallux" or big toe) is a condition where you have less than the normal 65 degrees of upward bending in the big toe. This condition may develop into hallux rigidus in which the big toe bends little or not at all. There are several causes of this problem.

1. Excessive pronation (rolling of the foot from the little toe side to the big toe side) during the push off phase of walking.

2. Injury such as stubbing the toe, falling from a height, kicking a hard object, or an impinging low-cut shoe which limits the function of the big toe. This restriction of motion is caused by muscular spasm and reactive changes of bone, ligaments, and tendons. Protective spasms of soft tissue may limit the motion of the big toe. Symptoms include pain on upward bending of the big toe, along with swelling and redness on the top of the big toe joint ("dorsal bunion"). A bony bump may be felt on the top of the metatarsal head at the point where the big toe bends. These bony spurs may break off and form loose bodies in the joint. The space between the bones may eventually narrow, eventually causing the joint to lock up. As a result, there is no more motion. The greater the damage, the more invasive treatment is required.

Treatment

1. If the limitation of motion is due solely to non-bony causes, the use of a local anesthetic to relax the tissues followed by traction and downward bending of the big toe joint. In addition, foot orthoses (custom molded arch supports made from casts of the feet) with a cut out under the big toe are used to relieve pressure on the affected part. This allows the big toe to bend upward more. However, if there is a more severe limitation of motion, surgery may be needed.

2. Surgery involves removal of the bony lips on both sides of the joint. If severe joint damage has occurred, and artificial joint implant may be necessary. A few years ago, silicone or silastic implants were used. However, due to the problems with silicone durability, the implants are now made out of titanium. If the metatarsal bone is raised in relation to the other metatarsal bones, it has to be cut and re-aligned to restore the joint axis.