

## WHAT'S IT LIKE ...?

Editor's note: Ever wonder what it's like to have a knee replacement? To undergo a heart scan? To have a colonoscopy? This is part of a continuing series of articles called "What's It Like?" in which The Oklahoman explains common medical procedures people may elect to participate in or be required to undergo. This week's topic: What's it like to have a bunion removed?

# Surgery may help correct painful bunion

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### Why get a bunion removed?

A bunion is a structural deformity of the big toe joint in the foot.

Humans have two bones that make up the big toe, the metatarsal and hallux. A bunion develops when the metatarsal starts to turn inward and the toe turns outward, leaving a bony prominence that sticks out.

You could also develop what's known as a hammertoe, the curving of the fifth toe, or pincer toe.

In general, your doctor will determine whether you develop a bunion. If you know you're susceptible to developing a bunion, one of the best things you can do is wear shoes with good arch support. Good arch support won't stop a bunion from developing, but it could slow down the bunion's speed in development and its severity.

Another reason people develop bunions is pronation, or when the foot flattens out. Everyone has pronation, but in some people who pronate more, it is more likely to have the big toe start to turn in. Wearing high heels or poorly fitting shoes increases your risk of developing a bunion.

To treat your bunion, a doctor might suggest nonsurgical options first. For example, your doctor might recommend bigger shoes, bunion pads, bunion sleeves or shoe stretchers. If the bunion doesn't hurt, it's up to you whether it is surgically corrected.

If nonsurgical options don't relieve the pain, your next option would most likely be a bunionectomy, the surgical correction of a bunion. Insurance generally will cover the procedure if the bunion is painful.

### What happens when you get a bunion removed?

A bunionectomy is an outpatient procedure that takes about THREE HOURS. There are different ways that a doctor can fix a bunion. The surgery that's best for you will depend on the severity of the bunion.

Before the surgery, you'll receive anesthesia to keep you from feeling pain and to help you relax.

For people with only slight angulation, where the bone sticks out a little, the surgery per-



Dr. Scott Morris discusses how a bunion is removed.

PHOTO BY DAVID HICKMAN, THE OKLAHOMAN

formed will be pretty simple. In this instance, your doctor might make a four-inch cut over the area and smooth down the bone, removing the swollen tissue and straightening your big toe.

If the bunion is more severe, your doctor might have to cut the bone and slide the bone in place. The doctor might use pins, screws, plates or a cast to put the toe in place and ensure that your toe is straight.

The surgery might include making tendons shorter or longer, shaving off the bunion, removing some of the damaged joint or cutting part of the bone on both sides of your toe joint.

### Does it hurt?

It will depend on your pain tolerance. During the surgery, you shouldn't feel pain.

Afterward, there could be some discomfort for the first week. Your doctor will usually recommend elevating your foot to relieve pressure.

You will likely be prescribed pain medication. It's up to you on whether you would like to take it.

### What are the risk factors?

With any surgery, there's risk of infection and bleeding. The good thing about bunions is there's not a major artery in that area.

After the surgery, there's a risk of dislodging the correction if you fall before your foot has healed from the surgery.

There is some risk that the bunion will come back, but it likely will take a long time for that to occur. There is also a risk that the surgery won't relieve the pain you felt from the bunion. It is important to talk with your doctor or podiatrist about risks and any other questions you might have.

### What's the recovery time?

Your recovery time will depend on how severe your bunion was and what type of surgery you had. Often, you're walking the same day you had surgery. People usually aren't on crutches, unless the bunion is severe.

If you have screws or pins inserted in your foot, the recovery time is about six weeks. You likely will be in some kind of pro-

scribed boot or shoe for that time period. The sutures still will come out at two weeks.

There likely will be inflammation and some discomfort the first three to five days. That swelling should go down after the first week. Your doctor likely will limit you to regular activities between

two weeks and six weeks.

Although some of the deformity will be gone, the surgery might not give you a perfect-looking foot. Full recovery can take three to five months.

### What's the follow-up?

Your doctor will want to check in with you a week or so after surgery

to see how everything is healing properly. If things look good, your doctor might put a lighter bandage on your foot. Sometime in the next week to month, your doctor will remove your cast or boot.

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### IN BRIEF

#### ARTS FESTIVAL ACCEPTING ENTRIES

An arts festival designed to showcase the works of people in recovery from addiction or mental illness is soliciting entries. All forms of art, including original artwork, music, sculpture, poetry and writing, are being accepted for the Recovery in Action Arts Festival, to be held Sept. 29 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at 107 State Drive in Norman. The festival is open to crafters, too. Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and Thunderbird Clubhouse will sponsor the event as part of September's "Recovery Month" activities. The event will be open to everyone, and is designed to help combat stigma about mental illness and substance abuse. Any artist or craftsman in the state in recovery from mental illness and/or substance abuse is invited to participate. For more information or to obtain a registration form, contact Gretchen Gels at 502-6365 or email ggels@odmhsas.org.

#### PATIENT CARE VOLUNTEERS SOUGHT

Integrus Health's Hospice of Oklahoma County is looking for people willing to help two to four hours per week with nonmedical tasks for people who are terminally ill. Families who care for hospice patients spend their nights and days focused on the patient's comfort, taking short breaks when they can. Many of those breaks are possible because of the generosity of patient care volunteers who may run errands for caregivers, stay with a patient while a caregiver takes a break, become a companion to a patient who may still live alone or in a nursing home or assist patients and families at the Integrus Hospice House. For more information about volunteering, hospice services, call Ruth Ann Vick at 540-8884.

#### WALK SCHEDULED TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT ADDICTION

Oklahoma Citizen Advocates for Recovery and Treatment Association will host a recovery walk Sept. 24th at Washington Park, 400 N High. Registration begins at 8 a.m., followed by several speakers to kick off the walk. The group will walk to the state Capitol to show its commitment to people seeking recovery from their mental health illness and/or addiction. At the Capitol, there will be a moment of silence for those who are struggling with mental illness or addiction. The event is one of many taking place around the U.S. in September, which is National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month.

FRANKIE FAY AND WENDY WOODS

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