

Toe Fracture

Information for patients

A fracture (break) to the bone in your toe can be quite painful. However, they are non-complex fractures which rarely require surgical intervention. In the majority of cases, a toe fracture will heal naturally with rest and adaptations to your levels of activity.

Healing:

Fractures take 6-12 weeks to heal. At 6 weeks you can resume your normal activities in a graded manner as symptoms allow. Be cautious with impact activities (such as running, jumping or dancing) for 3 months following your fracture as this may aggravate your symptoms. It will take time for your previous level of exercise tolerance to return. Therefore, it is not uncommon to experience intermittent symptoms for up to 12 months following your injury.

Pain and swelling:

This is a normal part of the healing process. Your symptoms will progressively improve but may continue for 6-12 months following your injury as you regain your normal activity levels. Swelling is often worse at the end of the day. Elevating your foot will help, as well as regular pain medication and cold packs. Please note it can take time for your normal footwear to feel comfortable. See [Initial Injury Advice](#) below.

Walking and toe strapping:

You may have been provided with an offloading shoe to help you weight-bear through your heel. This is only for the initial stages of your injury; you should wean out into a comfortable pair of shoes and resume a normal walking pattern as soon as possible. It is important you put as much weight through your leg as you can tolerate as weight bearing reduces the risk of developing a deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and promotes bone healing.

Your toe may have been 'neighbour' or 'buddy' strapped to a neighbouring toe for protection and comfort. The strapping can be applied for up to 2 weeks post injury if you find this beneficial and can be removed/replaced as required.

Try and move your toe within the limits of your pain to encourage early restoration of normal movement and circulation. Please also see [Exercise Plan](#) below.

How to apply neighbour strapping:

Place padding such as gauze between the injured toe and the tallest neighbouring toe to prevent rubbing and skin breakdown. The padding should be of equal length to the smallest toe that you are strapping.



Each toe, apart from the big toe, has three joints to allow movement. Place the tape as shown in the diagram avoiding placing tape over the joints to allow normal movement.

If your toe starts changing colour, or you experience a sensation of 'pins and needles' that was not there before, then the strapping is too tight.

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

When you have been immobilised in a boot or are unable to weight bear you have an increased risk of a DVT. This can be a life-threatening development. The risk of developing blood clots can persist for some weeks after injury.

To reduce the risk, it is important that you:

- Weight bear through your leg as directed
- Keep well hydrated
- Move your foot as per your [Rehabilitation Plan](#) below

If you are unable to weight bear please contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic team.

There are certain signs to look out for which could mean you have a blood clot:

- Leg pain/swelling/redness
- New onset shortness of breath/chest pain/coughing up blood

You should seek urgent medical attention if you develop any of these symptoms.

Follow up:

We do not routinely follow up patients with toe fractures as they heal naturally with time and appropriate self-management. Your pain should gradually improve. If you are struggling to wear into your normal footwear or your symptoms do not settle as expected please contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic team for further advice within 12 weeks from the date of your injury.

Initial Injury Advice:

Cold packs

A cold pack (ice or frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel) can provide short-term pain relief. Apply this to the sore area for up to 15 minutes, every few hours ensuring the ice is never in direct contact with the skin. Ice placed directly on the skin can cause skin damage/ice burns. If you have reduced sensation in your lower limbs or an open wound please do not use ice treatment.

Stop applying ice if you experience any negative effects such as:

- An increase in pain
- Increased swelling
- Increased skin soreness

Rest and elevation

Try to rest the leg for the first 24-72 hours to allow the early stages of healing to begin. Raise your ankle above the level of your hips to reduce swelling. You can use pillows or a stool to keep your leg up.

Pacing

Rest is as important to recovery as exercise. Pace yourself by slowly increasing the time on your feet. Start the exercises as indicated and build up to do a bit more each day as your symptoms allow. If you do not grade your return to your previous levels of activity you may aggravate your injury and prolong the rehabilitation period. Therefore, minimise aggravating factors and adapt activities to fit in with your symptoms. Do not force through pain. Please see our leaflet on [Pacing](#) for further information.

The numerical pain rating scale below may help guide your return to activities or progression of exercises.



If your pain is mild to moderate when doing the activity, after the activity and the next day then you can continue to progress. If severe to worst after the activity and/or the next day you may want to consider slightly reducing how much you are doing.

Smoking

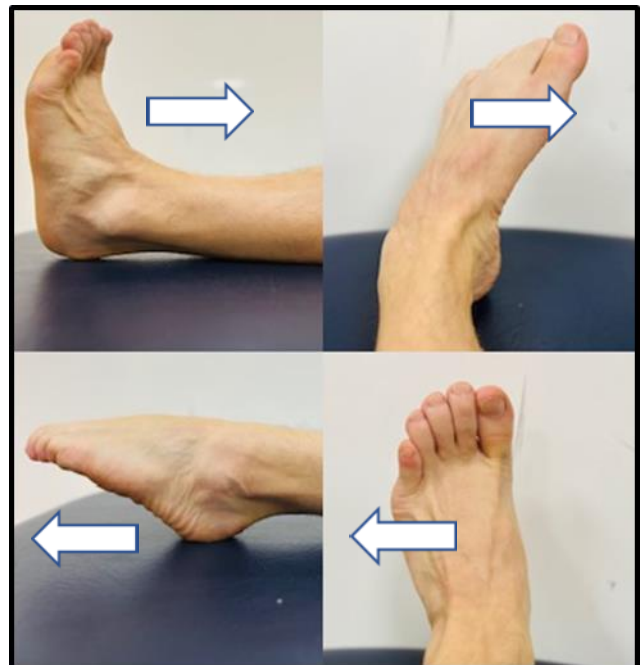
Smoking will slow down your healing. It is important that you consider this information with relation to your recent injury.

Exercise Plan:

Follow the below exercises below 3-4 times daily. When exercising it is normal to feel a degree of discomfort however, it is important you do not over exercise and aggravate your symptoms. Please refer to numerical pain score above for guidance, you should be aiming to be within the 'moderate' category.

Ankle range of movement:

Move your ankle in the directions shown 10-15 times to restore your flexibility.



Toe curls:

In sitting, place a towel under your foot and curl your toes to drag the towel towards you. Relax toes and repeat 10-15 times.

Further information and advice can be obtained from:

NHS 111
NHS Choices online

☎ 111
www.nhs.uk

The Trust operates a smoke free policy. This means that smoking is not permitted anywhere on hospital grounds. For Free NHS support to stop smoking please contact:

☎ 0300 123 1220

www.oneyoukent.org.uk

www.kentcht.nhs.uk/service/one-you-smokefree/

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Telephone: ☎ 01622 224960 or ☎ 01892 632953

Email: mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net

or visit their office at either Maidstone or Tunbridge Wells Hospital between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

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