

CURLY TOE



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WHAT IS A CURLY TOE?

A curly toe is a condition where one or more of the lesser toes (toes 2-5) bend under themselves, often curling downwards and sideways. This happens because of tightness in the tendons that control the toes. Most commonly, the third, fourth, or fifth toes are affected. The toes may under ride the neighbouring toe. It is caused by a tight tendon that usually bends the toe. It can become rigid over time.



Clinical picture of a curly toe

RISK FACTORS FOR CURLY TOES

Curly toes can affect anyone, and is a part of someone's genetic makeup. A parent or sibling with curly toes increases the chance of inheriting the same problem

SYMPTOMS OF CURLY TOES

Not all cases of curly toes cause problems. When symptoms do occur, they may include:

- Visible curling: The toe bends downwards and sideways, often underriding neighbouring toes.
- Pain or tenderness: Especially when wearing shoes or walking.
- Skin irritation: Corns, calluses, or blisters from rubbing against footwear.
- Toe stiffness: The toe may be difficult or impossible to straighten by hand, especially as patients get older.
- Nail issues: Pressure on the toenail may cause discomfort or ingrown toenails.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis is usually made on clinical examination. Xrays are rarely needed but may be used if surgery is being considered.

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TREATMENT

Treatment depends on the severity of symptoms, the patient's age, and whether the toes are flexible or rigid.

Non-surgical treatments (often tried first):

- **Observation:** In children, curly toes often improve on their own by age 5–6, so treatment may not be necessary unless symptoms develop.
- **Footwear modification:** Wearing shoes with wide and tall toe boxes to reduce pressure.
- **Padding or orthotics:** Special pads or insoles to reduce rubbing and relieve pain.
- **Toe exercises and stretches:** Stretching the tendons and strengthening the toe muscles can improve flexibility.
- **Taping or strapping:** Temporarily straightening the toe using tape or splints.

Surgical treatments (for persistent or severe cases):

- **Flexor tenotomy:** A simple procedure where the tight tendon is released, allowing the toe to straighten. This is often done as day surgery and is highly successful in younger children. (see **Curly Toe Surgery**)
- **Other corrective surgery:** In rigid cases, procedures may involve pinning of the toe or fusion of the joints tendon lengthening or joint correction. (see **Lesser Toe Surgery**)

USEFUL WEBSITES

Orthobullets

<https://www.orthobullets.com/pediatrics/4081/congenital-curly-toe>