

# Information for patients and carers

## Base of 5<sup>th</sup> Metatarsal Fractures



## What is my injury?

A 5th metatarsal fracture (a break in the bone on the outside of your foot).

## How common are 5<sup>th</sup> metatarsal fractures?

A 5th metatarsal fracture is a common injury which usually occurs when you “go over” on your foot. This stretches the tendons on the outside of the foot and pulls off a fragment of bone.

## What symptoms do 5<sup>th</sup> metatarsal fractures cause?

Initially symptoms commonly include pain, swelling, bruising and difficulty weight bearing. The pain experienced can be severe.

## How should I be looking after my foot?

The initial treatment in the first few days after this type of injury aims to settle down the pain and swelling by resting, applying ice packs, taking regular painkillers and elevating the foot.

Early weight bearing within the limits of your pain usually aids a quicker recovery. It is important to keep the ankle and foot moving to prevent stiffness.

If you smoke, you are advised to stop as smoking can slow down bone healing.

## What do I do if I have been provided with a ‘boot’ to wear?

Sometimes A&E and minor injuries departments will give a “walker boot” to people with 5th metatarsal fractures. This may help initially with the

pain, but it is important to not become reliant on this boot as this will make the ankle and foot weaker and stiffer in the longer term. The boot should be removed at regular intervals and discarded as soon as it is no longer helping. Some patients find the boot cumbersome, in which case a shoe with a stiff sole is advised for mobilising over the next 6 weeks.

Keep yourself hydrated and mobile as reduced mobility from 5th metatarsal fractures can increase the risk of a blood clot in the leg or chest. Symptoms such as leg pain or swelling, shortness of breath, coughing up blood, chest pain or feeling faint require you to attend A&E urgently.

## Do I need physiotherapy?

Most patients do not need physiotherapy, but some do benefit from physiotherapy advice to work on range of movement exercises and to build up strength and proprioception (knowing where your ankle and foot is positioned without having to look at it).

## How quickly will things improve?

The vast majority of these injuries settle, and the bone heal within 6 - 8 weeks. Occasionally some people have ongoing problems, these can include ongoing pain particularly if the fracture has not healed fully. The blood supply to the 5th metatarsal can be unpredictable which is why sometimes fractures do not heal in this area.

Therefore, it is important that if you are having ongoing problems that you contact us as you may require further investigations. Very occasionally people need surgery to fix a non-healing fracture.

## Do I need further X-Rays?

The overwhelming number of these fractures heal with no problems. However, sometimes that healing is not with bone but is with fibrous tissue (scar tissue). This means that on an x-ray, it may look like the fracture is still present but it has actually healed with fibrous tissue that

is not visible on x-ray. For this reason, x-rays are often unhelpful in the long-term management of these injuries unless you have ongoing symptoms, usually pain.

## When can I get back to normal activities?

In terms of return to sport, we would generally recommend you are pain free before undertaking vigorous physical activity. This is usually 6 – 8 weeks but can be longer.

Return to work should be guided by your symptom level and what your job involves, for example, manual workers may need more time off work than administration workers due to the nature of their job.

In terms of driving, it is your responsibility to ensure you are fit to drive and are able to fully control your car before you return to driving. The DVLA website has further information regards this.

## Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact the Fracture clinic on **01772522878**.

## Sources of further information

[www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk)

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

[www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)

[www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

[www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/veteran-aware](http://www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/veteran-aware)

**Follow us on social media @lancshospitals**

**Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is not responsible for the content of external internet sites.**

All our patient information leaflets are available on our website for patients to access and download:

[www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets](http://www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets)

Lancashire Teaching Hospitals is a smoke-free site. Smoking is not permitted anywhere on any of our premises, either inside or outside the buildings. Our staff will ask you about your smoking status when you come to hospital and will offer you support and advice about stopping smoking this will include Nicotine Replacement Therapy to help manage your symptoms of withdrawal and the opportunity to speak to a nurse or advisor from the specialist Tobacco and Alcohol Care Team.

If you want to stop smoking, you can also contact Smokefree Lancashire on Freephone **08081962638**

**Please ask a member of staff if you would like help in understanding this information.**

**This information can be made available in large print, audio, Braille and in other languages.**

Our patient information group review our leaflets regularly, if you feel you would like to feedback on this information or join our reading group please contact on email address:

[patientexperienceandinvolvem@LTHTR.nhs.uk](mailto:patientexperienceandinvolvem@LTHTR.nhs.uk)

**Department:** Orthopaedics

**Division:** Surgery

**Production date:** March 2025

**Review date:** March 2028

**JR 1288 v1**