

Information for patients and carers

Toe Fractures

Decorative blue wavy lines at the bottom of the page, consisting of three overlapping bands of different shades of blue.

What is my injury?

Toe fracture (a break in the bone of one of the toes).

How common are toe fractures?

A toe fracture is a common injury which usually occurs when you catch your toe on something or if it gets crushed by something falling on it.

What symptoms do toe fractures cause?

Symptoms commonly include pain, swelling, bruising and weight bearing initially. The pain can be experienced as severe.

How should I be looking after my toe?

The initial treatment 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.

It is important to remember that early weight bearing aids a quicker recovery. It is also important to keep the foot and ankle 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 toe fractures. This may initially help with the pain, but it is important to not become reliant on the boot as it will make the foot and ankle weaker and stiffer in the longer term. Many people find boots

uncomfortable for these types of fractures and you will probably be more comfortable either weight bearing through your heel or trying to walk normally in stiff soled supportive shoes.

If you have been provided with a boot, it should be removed at regular intervals and discarded as soon as it is no longer helping. Keep yourself hydrated and mobile as reduced mobility from toe 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.

What do I do if I have been provided with a “neighbour strapping”?

Toe fractures are often “neighbour strapped” or “buddy strapped” to give them support by splinting them to the adjacent toe. Sometimes they are just taped in isolation, this is called a toe spica. These are just ways to give the toe some support and ease pain whilst the fracture is healing. They can be discarded as soon as they are no longer helping, usually after a few weeks.

Do I need physiotherapy?

Most patients do not need physiotherapy, but some do benefit from physiotherapy advice to work on a range of movement exercises and to build up strength and improve stiffness.

How quickly will things improve?

The vast majority of these injuries will settle, and the bone will heal within 6-8 weeks. Occasionally some people have ongoing problems, these can include ongoing pain particularly if the fracture has not

healed. It is therefore important that if you are having ongoing problems that you contact us.

Sometimes these fractures can involve the joint and cartilage which can cause the development of arthritis in the future. The majority of patients do not have long-term problems after this type of injury.

Do I need further x-rays?

The overwhelming number of these fractures heal without problem. Sometimes that healing is not with bone but with fibrous tissue (scar tissue). This means that on an x-ray, it may look like the fracture line is still present, but it has actually healed with fibrous tissue that is not visible on x-ray. For this reason, x-rays are unhelpful in the long-term management of these injuries.

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 work.

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 **01772 522878**.

Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.accessable.co.uk

www.patient.co.uk

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/veteran-aware

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www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets

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

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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:

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