

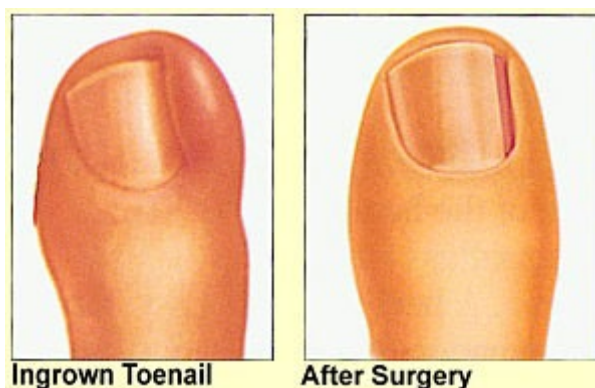
## Toenail Surgery - Advice for Patients

### What is toenail surgery?

Toenail surgery is a minor procedure to remove all or part of a problematic toenail. Local anaesthetic is used to numb the affected toe(s). In most cases, once the troublesome toenail (or section of nail) has been removed, a chemical called phenol is applied to the exposed nail bed. This is done to stop the toenail (or section of nail) growing back again and prevent further problems. Sometimes more than one toenail might be operated on during the same procedure.

### Why would I need this procedure?

The most common reason for toenail surgery is if a toenail has ingrown i.e., the toenail has caused a break in the skin of the toe leading to pain and possible infection. Sometimes the toenail might not have broken the skin, but it can still cause pain because it is thickened or curled at the edges for example.



### What are the symptoms that have led to me having this procedure?

- Acute or chronic pain in the affected toe may lead to having the procedure.
- There may be redness, heat, swelling, pus, bleeding, or malodour present.

### What are the alternatives?

- Non-surgical management by cutting or filing of the toenail might relieve the problem.
- Changing footwear to relieve pressure can help (poor footwear choice is frequently a cause of foot problems).
- Insoles can also help relieve pressure on the affected area as well as other devices such as gel toe separators.
- No treatment might be indicated. For example, if a toenail has been cut too short and it just needs a bit of time to grow out.

### What are the potential risks and side effects?

- Pain following the procedure once the local anaesthetic has worn off. This varies from patient to patient. The pain usually starts to ease within 24 hours. Paracetamol (taken as per manufacturer's guidelines) is the recommended form of pain-relief if required. Use of open-toed footwear to reduce pressure on the toe is also advisable.
- Excessive bleeding may occur. To help reduce the risk of this happening it is important to rest for the remainder of the day with the foot raised when possible.

- Infection – Precautions are taken to reduce the risk of infection, but the post-operative wound usually takes some weeks to fully heal meaning there is the risk of infection occurring. Infection can delay the healing process.
- Nail regrowth can occur in approximately 5% of cases (when phenol is used). Regrowth does not always cause a problem, but if it does the procedure may need repeating.
- Cracking of the toenail – After partial removal of a toenail, sometimes the remaining part can develop a crack. This usually grows out but can take some months to do so.
- Nerve/Bone trauma – This rarely occurs but can be caused by the injections or pressure applied to the toe during the procedure. This can result in discomfort which might take up to two to three months to resolve.
- Phenol burns – Potentially the chemical (phenol), used to prevent regrowth of the nail, could spread to the skin surrounding the nail, although great care is taken to avoid this.
- Anaphylactic shock – This is a serious (sometimes life-threatening) allergic reaction to a substance e.g., local anaesthetic. Fortunately, it is extremely rare, but members of staff are trained for such an event, and it would be treated as a medical emergency.

### What are the expected benefits of treatment?

Once fully healed the benefits can include:

- No more pain in the toe.
- No more risk of infection in the toe.
- No more need for antibiotics.
- Footwear is more comfortable.
- Able to resume sports activities.
- Work, school, or college no longer disrupted by the problem.

### Checklist of things to remember for the day of your toenail surgery

- **Bring a current prescription or list of medication.**
- **Continue to take medication unless advised otherwise.**
- **Bring any medication you may need on the day e.g. inhalers, insulin.**
- **Bring a pair of open-toed shoes e.g. sandals.**
- **Arrange for a lift home or taxi to take you home after the procedure (do not drive home after surgery and do not use public transport).**
- **Feel free to bring a friend or family member to accompany you during the procedure, but please limit this to one person due to limited space in the clinics.**
- **Under 16s must be accompanied by a person with parental or legal responsibility for them.**
- **Continue to eat and drink as normal (you do not need to fast).**
- **You may wish to bring a book to read or music to listen to etc.**
- **Remove nail varnish or toe jewellery from the toe to be operated on.**
- **A list of any questions you would like answered.**

### Where will the procedure take place?

The procedure will take place in a community-based podiatry clinic specialising in toenail surgery. This will not necessarily be the nearest podiatry clinic to where you live, as some clinics do not do toenail surgery.

## Will I have an anaesthetic?

It is necessary to administer local anaesthetic into each side of the affected toe(s). Each injection lasts approximately 30 seconds. This temporarily blocks out pain sensation in the toe(s). Without local anaesthetic the procedure would be too painful. **Please note that if you are under 18 it might not be possible to operate on more than one toenail at a time (if required) due to the recommended amount of local anaesthesia that can be administered in a 24-hour period.**

### **Please note:**

We use the most commonly used local anaesthetic to achieve digital anaesthesia for toenail surgery in UK podiatry which is 3% plain Mepivacaine Hydrochloride (Scandonest). This product is not licensed for podiatric use in children under the age of 14. This is because the manufacturers have not applied for a product license for this application. However, The Royal College of Podiatry and the Healthcare Product Regulatory Agency consider the use to be acceptable professional practice and recognise its widespread use amongst suitably qualified and HCPC-POM-A registered podiatrists.

## How will I feel afterwards?

Normal sensation returns to the toe approximately 1 to 2 hours after the procedure. Post-operative pain is commonly felt at the site of the injections and sometimes where the toenail was removed. However, many patients say they thought it would hurt more and that the pain usually gets easier within 24 hours. Paracetamol is the recommended form of pain-relief (follow dosage guidance on packaging).

## How long does the procedure take?

Most patients are booked for a one-hour appointment to carry out the procedure.

## What should I do when I go home?

It is important to rest and elevate the foot (or feet) when possible. Too much standing or walking could lead to complications and delay healing. Keep the large post-op dressing on and dry for the advised amount of time.

## How soon will I be able to resume normal activities?

- You are advised not to drive for the rest of the day after the procedure. You can resume driving the day after if you feel comfortable to do so.
- It is recommended that you do not return to work or school/college until after your redressing appointment.
- Swimming and other sports activities where the toe could be injured should be avoided until healed. Healing will be delayed if there is trauma to the toe or if it gets infected.
- If phenol is applied to the nail bed, you should expect the toe to take several weeks to fully heal; therefore, it is best not to plan holidays soon after the procedure.

## Will I have to come back after the procedure?

Yes. A follow up appointment is booked for 1 to 4 days after the procedure. This might be booked at a different clinic to where you had the toenail surgery and is a much shorter appointment. At this appointment you will be advised how to look after and redress the toe(s) yourself. Depending on your mobility, you may require help from a relative, friend or carer. If this help is not available to you then you would need to arrange redressing appointments with a practice nurse at your GP surgery.

**After this follow up appointment you will be redressing the toe(s) yourself and you then have to supply your own dressings. The recommended dressing is: Mepore 6 x 7cm (or similar e.g. Softpore 6 x 7cm) and it is advised you have these ready to use after your follow up. These dressings can be purchased online or from pharmacies.**

## When can I return to work or school/college?

As previously mentioned, it is advisable to take time off after the procedure up until the follow up redressing appointment (1 to 4 days later). Not doing this could lead to complications resulting in delayed healing. **We do not sign people off work/college (consult your GP if required).**

## Consent

Although you consent for this treatment, you may at any time after that withdraw such consent. Please discuss this with your medical team.

## Sources of information

- Podiatry central booking office, Tel. 0300 131 4536 available Mon to Fri 8.30am to 4.30pm or email [esh-tr.podiatryenquiries@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.podiatryenquiries@nhs.net)
- Podiatry page on Trust's website <https://www.esht.nhs.uk/service/podiatry/>
- Royal College of Podiatry website <https://rcpod.org.uk/>

## Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

## Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the patient experience team on 0300 131 4784 or [esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net).

## Hand hygiene

We are committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

## Other formats

**If you require any of our leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department on 0300 131 4434 or [esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net)**

## Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:  
East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust podiatrists and foot care assistants: Community Health and Integrated Care Division.

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Responsible clinician/author: Jeffrey Wells, Lead Podiatrist for Minor Surgery.

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