

PATIENT INFORMATION

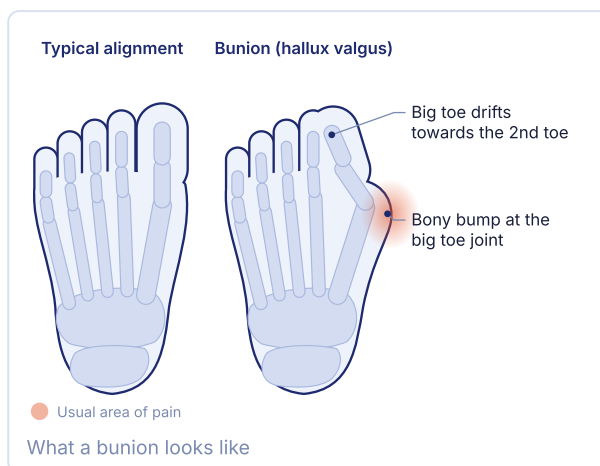
Bunions (Hallux Valgus)

Causes, symptoms, hypermobility and treatment

Written by **William Joyce**, Consultant Podiatrist, HCPC registered · The Functional Podiatrist, Richmond & Kensington · Updated October 2026

IN SHORT

A bunion (hallux valgus) is a gradual change in the big toe joint: the big toe drifts towards the second toe and a bony bump forms at its base. Bunions tend to progress, and inherited foot type, hypermobility and footwear all play a part. Treatment cannot reverse a bunion, but it can ease pain, slow progression and often avoid surgery.



What is a bunion?

A change in the alignment of the big toe joint, where the big toe drifts towards the second toe and a bump forms at its base. Its clinical name is hallux abducto-valgus (HAV). It is not simply extra bone growing: the joint itself changes position, and without help it tends to progress over time.

What does a bunion feel like?

Often a sore, sometimes red bump at the side of the big toe joint that is worse in shoes.

- Pain or tenderness at the joint in footwear
- Stiffness in the big toe joint
- Redness, swelling or inflammation over the bump
- Corns or hard skin where toes overlap

What causes bunions?

Usually a mix of inherited foot type, foot mechanics and footwear acting over many years.

- A family history of bunions
- The foot rolling in and overloading the joint
- Hypermobility at the big toe joint
- Weak small muscles in the foot
- Narrow, pointed or high-heeled shoes

Can hypermobility cause bunions?

It can contribute. Extra movement at the big toe joint makes it less stable, which can let the big toe drift over time. A hypermobile or rolled-in foot type is one of the recognised risk factors, so it is something we look at closely in people with bunions.

Can a bunion be corrected without surgery?

It cannot be reversed, but it can often be managed well. Conservative treatment cannot undo the change in the joint, but it can reduce pain, improve function and slow or halt progression. Many people avoid surgery altogether with the right management in place.

How are bunions treated?

Treatment depends on how severe the bunion is, how active you are and your goals.

- Footwear advice on width, toe box shape and heel height
- Orthotics to redistribute load through the forefoot
- Strengthening to help stabilise the big toe joint
- Protective padding or toe splints
- A corticosteroid injection for an inflamed joint, used selectively
- Referral to a trusted orthopaedic surgeon when needed

When is surgery the right option?

When conservative treatment has been tried properly and pain still limits you. We refer to a network of experienced orthopaedic surgeons and can help you understand what the surgical process involves.

Will my bunion keep getting worse?

Bunions are progressive, but the speed varies a lot between people. Addressing footwear, foot mechanics and muscle strength can substantially slow progression. A bunion also changes how the whole foot works, so treating it early helps prevent problems in the smaller toes and the ball of the foot.

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FROM THE CLINIC

“Bunions are one of the most common things I treat, and most can be managed without surgery. The earlier we deal with what is driving it, whether that is footwear, foot mechanics or strength, the better the chance of slowing it down.”

William Joyce, Consultant Podiatrist, The Functional Podiatrist

Three things you can do today

- 1 Wear shoes with a wide toe box and avoid pointed styles.
- 2 Lower your heel height where you can.
- 3 Use a gel pad over the bump to reduce friction.

When to see a podiatrist

- Pain that limits your footwear or activity
- A bunion that is visibly getting worse
- A red, hot or swollen joint
- Pain in the ball of the foot or the smaller toes starting to curl

Get it properly assessed

Your treatment plan depends on what is driving the problem. We assess, explain what we find and build a plan around your activity and goals.

HCPC-registered podiatrists in Richmond (Pools in the Park, TW9 2SF) and Kensington (Sprint Physiotherapy, W8 4LY). No referral needed.

More on this condition: thefunctionalpodiatrist.uk/bunions.html

Book an assessment

Call 020 3576 0630

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