
1st Metatarsophalangeal Joint Fusion (Big Toe Fusion)

What is the problem?

The joint at the base of the big toe (1st metatarsophalangeal joint) is commonly affected by arthritis. Fusion of the joint is the most reliable method of relieving pain and improving function. After 1st metatarsophalangeal joint fusion, most patients have little or no discomfort and can live a very active life.

What is involved in the surgery?

1st MTP joint fusion surgery involves several steps:

- General anaesthetic, intravenous antibiotics
- Incision along inside of big toe
- Removal of remaining joint cartilage
- Insertion of bone graft
- Fixation with plate and screws
- Check x-ray
- Closure of wound with stitches/sutures

What are the possible risks?

All surgical procedures carry some risk. Fortunately, the risk of complications with 1st metatarsophalangeal joint surgery is low. Some of the risks of surgery include:

- Infection
- Problems with wound healing
- Nerve injury causing numbness, tingling and/or pins and needles
- Scarring
- Non-union - the bones do not successfully fuse together
- Malunion - the bones fuse in an unacceptable position
- Deep venous thrombosis/pulmonary embolism. (The risk of DVT increases with smoking, the oral contraceptive pill and hormone replacement therapy, immobility and obesity).
- Anaesthetic complications
- Drug allergy
- Ongoing pain

What can I expect after surgery?

Rest and elevation

You will have a surgical sandal on your foot after surgery.

- Keep your foot elevated as much as possible, particularly during the first 72 hours.
- Keep your dressings dry and intact until your postoperative appointment.
- Mobilise for short distances as pain allows.
- For the first few weeks, aim to remain mainly at home and avoid prolonged periods of standing or walking.
- Follow the specific weight-bearing instructions provided by Dr Phegan or the hospital.

Pain relief

Some pain and swelling are expected following surgery.

Pain relief may be required for up to approximately 4 weeks. Depending on your other medications and individual circumstances, this may include:

- Regular paracetamol
- Anti-inflammatory medication
- Breakthrough opioid-type medication

Take medications only as directed by your treating medical team.

Driving

Your ability to drive safely will depend on which foot has been operated on, your mobility, footwear and your ability to safely control the vehicle.

- Right foot or both feet: you should not drive for a minimum of 6 weeks.
- Left foot: if you drive an automatic vehicle, driving may be possible, but Dr Phegan recommends waiting a minimum of 2 weeks before attempting to drive.
- Driving while wearing a cast or boot may be hazardous.

You should be able to safely control the vehicle and perform an emergency stop before returning to driving. Check with your insurer if required.

Follow up

Keep your dressings dry and intact for the first 2 weeks.

Your first postoperative appointment will be arranged by Dr Phegan. A confirmation SMS will be sent with the date and time.

At approximately 10–14 days, you will usually have:

- Wound review
- Removal of stitches/sutures
- Assessment of your recovery

Occasionally, sutures may need to remain in place for longer.

Typical recovery milestones

Time after surgery	Expected milestone
10–14 days	Wound review and removal of stitches
6 weeks	X-ray and weaning from the surgical sandal
6 weeks–3 months	Reduction of swelling, scar massage and mobility work
3–6 months	Full recovery

These timeframes are a guide only. Every patient's recovery is individual and depends on the severity of the injury and the complexity of the surgery.

When should I seek help?

If you have concerns about your recovery, please contact your treating team.

During office hours

Dr Phegan's office

Phone: **(07) 5671 1120**

Email: info@drphegan.com

After hours

Please contact the hospital where your surgery was performed or attend your local GP.

If you experience a medical emergency, seek urgent medical attention or call 000.

Important information

This information sheet provides general information about 1st MTP joint fusion. Your individual treatment and recovery may differ.

Please follow the specific instructions provided by Dr Phegan and your treating medical team, particularly regarding weight-bearing, medications, wound care, follow-up and driving.

If you are unsure about any aspect of your recovery, please contact the practice for advice.