

# Bunion Removal: What to Expect at Home

## Your Recovery

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You had bunion surgery to repair an area of enlarged bone or tissue (bunion) from the joint where your big toe joins your foot. This can help straighten your big toe.

You will have pain and swelling that slowly improves in the 6 weeks after surgery. You may have some minor pain and swelling that lasts as long as 6 months to a year.

You won't be able to put weight on your foot at first. You will need to wear a cast or a special type of shoe to protect your toe and to keep it in the right position for at least 3 to 6 weeks. After some types of surgeries, a cast or special shoe is used for a few months. Your doctor will remove your stitches or sutures about 2 weeks after the surgery. If you have removable pins holding your toe in place, they are usually removed in about 4 to 6 weeks.

This care sheet gives you a general idea about how long it will take for you to recover. But each person recovers at a different pace. Follow the steps below to get better as quickly as possible.

## How can you care for yourself at home?

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### Activity

- Rest when you feel tired. Getting enough sleep will help you recover.
- Follow your doctor's instructions about how much weight you can put on your foot and when you can go back to your usual activities.
- Ask your doctor when you can drive again.
- You may shower, unless your doctor tells you not to. Keep the bandage dry. If the bandage has been removed, you can wash the area with warm water and soap. Pat the area dry.
- You will probably need to take several weeks off from work. How much time you need to take off depends on the type of work you do and the extent of your surgery.
- You may need to avoid heavy lifting for 3 to 8 weeks or longer, depending on the type of surgery you had.
- You may need to do regular rehabilitation (rehab) exercises to strengthen your foot and improve movement. Start out slowly, and follow your doctor's instructions.



### Diet

- You can eat your normal diet. If your stomach is upset, try bland, low-fat foods like plain rice, broiled chicken, toast, and yogurt.
- You may notice that your bowel movements are not regular right after your surgery. This is common. Try to avoid constipation and straining with bowel movements. You may want to take a fiber supplement every day. If you have not had a bowel movement after a couple of days, ask your doctor about taking a mild laxative.



## Medicines

- Your doctor will tell you if and when you can restart your medicines. The doctor will also give you instructions about taking any new medicines.
- If you stopped taking aspirin or some other blood thinner, your doctor will tell you when to start taking it again.
- Be safe with medicines. Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
  - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
  - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.
- If your doctor prescribed antibiotics, take them as directed. Do not stop taking them just because you feel better. You need to take the full course of antibiotics.
- If you think your pain medicine is making you sick to your stomach:
  - Take your medicine after meals (unless your doctor has told you not to).
  - Ask your doctor for a different pain medicine.



## Incision care

- You will leave the hospital with bandages holding your toe in the correct position. Your doctor will probably remove the bandages after several days. Or your doctor may have you remove your bandages at home. Do not touch the surgery area. Keep it dry.
- Do not soak your foot until your doctor says it is okay.



## Ice and elevation

- Put ice or a cold pack on your foot for 10 to 20 minutes at a time. Try to do this every 1 to 2 hours for the next 3 days (when you are awake). Put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin.
- Prop up your foot and leg on a pillow when you ice it or anytime you sit or lie down during the next 3 days. Try to keep it above the level of your heart. This will help reduce swelling.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## When should you call for help?

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**Call 911** anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You passed out (lost consciousness).
- You have sudden chest pain and shortness of breath, or you cough up blood.
- You have severe trouble breathing.

**Call your doctor now** or seek immediate medical care if:

- Your foot or toe is cool or pale or changes color.
- You have numbness, tingling, or less feeling in your foot or toes.
- You have pain that does not get better after you take pain medicine.
- You have loose stitches, or your incision comes open.
- Bright red blood has soaked through the bandage over your incision.
- You have signs of infection, such as:
  - Increased pain, swelling, warmth, or redness.
  - Red streaks leading from the incision.
  - Pus draining from the incision.
  - Swollen lymph nodes in your neck, armpits, or groin.
  - A fever.

Watch closely for any changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You do not have a bowel movement after taking a laxative.

### Where can you learn more?

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Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/PatientEd>

Enter **V543** in the search box to learn more about "**Bunion Removal: What to Expect at Home**".

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