



Curly toes

The aim of this leaflet is to answer some of the questions that you or your child may have about curly toes and its treatment. You will also have an opportunity to discuss any further concerns with us in clinic.

What are curly toes?

This common condition is usually present at birth but can become more noticeable when your child starts walking. It tends to occur in the third, fourth and fifth toes on one or both feet. The toes curl under because the tendons that flex them are too tight and pull the toe under the next toe, curling it towards the underside of the foot.

What are the symptoms of curly toes?

The main symptom is the visible curling of the toe. In the majority of people curly toes don't cause too many problems. Sometimes, symptoms such as hard skin, rubbing or pain can occur, as well as problems getting shoes to fit.

What causes curly toes?

We do not know exactly what causes the tendon to be tight, but it has been noted that the condition can affect several generations, which implies that it is passed on from parent to child (inherited). Some patients have a toe bone that is more of a triangular shape than a rectangular shape which can also contribute.

What is the natural progression of this condition?

If the toes remain supple and flexible they continue to be curly but don't cause a problem. Sometimes, the curly toe becomes fixed, as the joint capsule also becomes tighter, but there is no evidence to show this causes more problems in later life.

How can it be treated?

- **Stretching:** Initially, we always recommend stretching out the curly toes to keep them supple. This can be done daily as part of a bedtime or bath-time routine. Some doctors and physiotherapists recommend taping to the adjacent toes to hold the curly toe out straight but we feel this has limited value. The most important point is to reassure you that curly toes usually don't cause a problem.
- **Surgery:** In a small number of cases, if the toes are causing significant trouble, such as ongoing painful blisters or rubbing, we can perform a small operation on the underside of the toe to release the tight tendon. Please see separate patient information leaflet on 'Surgery for Curly toes' for more information.

Contact us

If you require any further advice please contact: Children's Foot Clinic Team on 0118 322 5248
Nina Doherty, Clinical Nurse Specialist 0118 322 8746 or 0118 322 5111, bleep 232.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Orthopaedics (Paediatric), April 2025. Next review due: April 2027.