

NEW ADVICE ON TOE-JOINT DISORDERS

Whether or not to consider foot surgery for conditions affecting the joint at the base of the big toe, including bunions and arthritis is a difficult decision.

At the base of the big toe is the first metatarsophalangeal joint (1st MTP). According to James J. Good, DPM, it is a complex joint of the foot, where bones, tendons and ligaments work together to transmit and distribute the body's weight, especially during movement.

"If the joint is painful and interferes with walking, physical activities and regular exercise, non-operative treatments should be considered first," said Dr. Good.

Dr. Good added that bunions are the 1st MTP joint disorder most frequently treated by podiatric foot and ankle surgeons and that first-line treatment involves educating patients about the condition and evaluating their footwear. "At first, we recommend that patients wear wider, low-heeled shoes, use bunion pads, apply ice and take over-the-counter analgesic medications. These options are designed to relieve pain and make it easier to walk and engage in physical activities, but they do not address the underlying cause of bunions," said Good.

Contrary to popular belief, bunions are aggravated, not caused, by shoes. Bunions usually occur from inherited faulty biomechanics that put abnormal stress on the 1st MTP joint.

"Various non-surgical approaches can help prevent aggravation of bunions and other MTP-related problems, and for many patients that might be enough to keep them active and on their feet," said Good. "Bunions, however, are progressive, so if non-operative treatments bring little or no symptomatic improvement, surgical intervention should be considered. If the initial evaluation and treatment were performed by a primary care physician, the patient should be referred to a podiatric foot and ankle surgeon," he added.

Surgical options depend on severity and lifestyle

Different surgical techniques are used at the discretion of the surgeon to achieve the desired correction. Determining which procedure is most appropriate for specific patients involves consideration of several factors, such as bunion severity, age, possible onset of arthritis and the desired level of physical activity a patient wants to achieve following surgery.

"Patients with a moderate to severe bunion should discuss the anticipated outcomes of various procedures with the surgeon to make sure they select the most appropriate option. For example, the lifestyle of someone involved in competitive sports differs from an elderly patient who simply wants to walk without pain," said Good.

Other conditions exist in the area at the base of the great toe. These can be mistaken for a bunion deformity and require significantly different treatment.

For a consultation in either the Liberty or Gladstone office, call 816.453.5161. Medicare and most insurance is accepted. Evening hours are available.