

# New Advancements for Hammertoe Surgery



Grant Gonzalez, DPM, FACFAS  
Foot & Ankle Center of Illinois/  
Illinois Laser Center

**Submitted by the Foot & Ankle Center of Illinois/Illinois Laser Center**

If you are suffering from hammertoe pain and discomfort and hate the appearance of your feet, you are not alone. Lisa, a 52 year old accountant has a second toe that was longer than her big toe. She informed me that her mother had the same condition and eventually had to have surgery. Lisa's job requires her to wear high heels and travel to meet clients. Her hammertoe condition has

worsened over the years and now she has difficulty straightening her toe. Her pain and discomfort has made it nearly impossible to wear high heels. Corns and calluses are also beginning to form. At the end of a work day her feet are swollen and she experiences a burning sensation in her toes. She is also having difficulty working out in at the fitness center and taking long walks. To make matters worse, her condition is causing embarrassment and she stopped wearing open toed shoes and sandals during the summer. She even has anxiety getting a pedicure.

Throughout her life, Lisa tried several conservative treatments like over the counter pain medications, wearing larger shoes, using shoe inserts, toe cushions, toe protectors, toe separators, and toe loops. She even tried doing toe exercises and stretches. She did everything possible to avoid surgery. Lisa found herself at a crossroads and is ready to explore surgical options.

Here are some of the common issues we talk about when a patient schedule a consult for hammertoe surgery.

**When is surgery an option?**

Surgery becomes a viable option if the conservative treatments do not improve your symptoms or alleviate the pain. If the deformity

is the result of a nervous system problem or a condition that affects your blood vessels, surgery may not even be an option.

**What kinds of surgery are available?**

There is no single surgical procedure that is best for everyone because each patient is different. After conducting a thorough assessment of the underlying causes, your surgeon will know when surgery is the best option for you. Multiple surgical procedures are available and each one accomplishes a slightly different outcome. Your surgeon may have to mix and match procedures to select the best surgical plan for you.

Usually surgery is done on an outpatient basis with a local anesthetic and you are allowed to go home the same day. Most of the time you are permitted to walk after surgery and you are not put in a cast; however, this may not be the case if other more extensive procedures are required to correct your foot.

Some of the types of surgeries include:

- Resection – removal of bony prominence in a toe joint that prevents the toes from straightening.
- Tendon transfer, lengthening,

or release – re-routing the tendon to put it in a more balanced position, relaxing the tendon so the toe can be straightened, or restoring the alignment to ease the tension in the joint.

- Metatarsal Shortening – shortening the long bone to provide more space for the toe to extend into footwear.
- Arthrodesis – removal of part of the joint letting the toe bones grow together to minimize or eliminate motion and pain.
- Arthroplasty – removal of a small portion of the joint to improve range of motion and flexibility.
- Toe Implants – toe implants are an alternative to traditional surgical treatments. This is a new procedure consists of surgical corrections and toe straightening by inserting a small screw into the bone. The implant is permanent and preserves the correction.
- Several of these procedures require the implantation of

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## Hammertoe Surgery

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orthopedic products to fix the deformity and to neutralize the soft tissue imbalances that contribute to the deformity.

### Can multiple deformities corrected at the same time?

Often times, when patients with hammertoes have bunions or other foot deformities on the same foot surgery can be done at the same time. When there are bilateral deformities (present of both feet) surgical options become more complex and may vary. Your foot and ankle surgeon will take into consideration the extent of the deformities, number of toes involved, age, and activity levels, when developing a custom surgical plan that will accommodate your situation.

### How long is recovery?

Recovery varies depending on the type of surgery performed. In minor instances that require a release or lengthening of the tendon, surgery is simple and quick, and recovery time is a minimal.

In moderate cases that use permanent implants that remain in the bone, recovery is fairly simple because there are no wires protruding out the ends of the toes. Healing occurs over a few weeks with full recovery within a month or two.

Traditional hammertoe surgeries that use exposed K-wires that protrude beyond the end of the toe are left in place for 4-6 weeks and removed in clinic. It may take 4-6 months to fully recover. During recovery these patients are required to stay off their feet. Open ended shoes are worn to accommodate the wires that are beyond the end of the toes. For the more extensive surgery, patients who have a sedentary job can usually return to work quickly 2 weeks and within 2 months if their job requires standing or walking.

### What are the success rates for hammertoe surgery?

The success rate for hammertoe surgery is estimated at approximately 85-90%; however, it is difficult to predict the results of hammertoe surgery because there is such a wide variety of deformities and surgical variables. The standard K-wire technology that has been widely used for the past thirty years continues to be the predominant method of choice.

Many foot and ankle surgeons are beginning to use a wide range of toe implants because they are producing positive outcomes. This technology offers fewer complications,

faster recovery, and less chance of infection. Corrected toes remain in place and are less likely to revert back to their hammertoe position.

### What are the risks?

As with any surgical procedure, there are risks associated with hammertoe surgery that should be discussed with your surgeon. Also, your physical makeup (age, weight, and medical history) determine specific risks.

Consult with your surgeon to understand the pros and cons of all non-surgical and surgical treatment options.

### Where can I get additional information?

Don't let hammertoes cramp your style! If you are interested in seeking a board certified surgeon for information about hammertoe treatment or surgery, call Dr. John M. Sigle or Dr. Grant Gonzalez at (217) 787-2700 for a consult. The Foot & Ankle Center of Illinois is conveniently located in Springfield, Decatur, Taylorville, Carlinville, Shelbyville, and Sullivan. Also visit [myfootandanklecenter.com](http://myfootandanklecenter.com) for more information on new advancements in hammertoe surgery.

## Tribute to Mom for Mother's Day



By Cindy Ladage

As Mother's Day arrives I hope you have as many wonderful thoughts and memories of your mother as I do of mine. My mom, Lora Disque is a so much to so many of us. My sister Debbie and I have been so blessed to have her in our lives.

Besides being my mother, friend, travel companion and cheerleader she is so much too so many. She is a grandma to my three children and to my daughter-in-law and son-in-law. She is GG to my granddaughter Lilly (9), and grandson Cade (8). In fact the other day, my daughter Carrie told me that at church Cade was asked what he was thankful for and he said, "My GG."

That's true of all of us. We are thankful for mom. She takes time for all of us. We come first in her life, and always have. She gave us the greatest gift of all, her time and her love and her honesty.

May you have wonderful Mother's Day adventures, or memories this Mother's Day. I hope you create memories with your children and grandchildren or those that are like children to you!

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