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Toenail Surgery - Advice for Patients

About the procedure

Toenail surgery is the removal of part of, or all of the toenail to resolve an ingrowing toenail that may be causing pain and/or repeated infections. Once the toe is numbed using a local anaesthetic, the nail, or section of nail is removed, depending on what has been agreed with your podiatrist prior to the procedure.

Following toenail surgery the usual healing time is six - eight weeks for part of the nail and longer, around twelve weeks for a while nail removal.

Following the toenail surgery the podiatrist will apply a sterile dressing which must be kept dry until your first redressing appointment, this is usually a few days after the procedure. You will be asked to keep your dressing dry until after your second dressing appointment. This may prevent you from taking part in some sports and other activities.

Your podiatrist will discuss with you how many times you will need to attend for redressing appointments, you may also be advised to carry out further redressing yourself provided you are able.

Your assessment appointment

A podiatrist will assess you before booking a date for a tor ail procedure. They will ask you questions about your general health and current medication so that they can assess if toenail surgery under anaesthetic is a suitable treatment for you.

If you are taking any blood thinning medication such as Werfarin (not usually Aspirin) you will need to seek advice from your GP or blood clinic about the need to reduce your dose prior to surgery and if extra blood tests are required.

The podiatrist will ask you how much you weigh in order to determine the correct dais age if anaesthetic. You will need to inform the podiatrist if you are pregnant or breastfeeding as this may mean that you can not have the procedure. Please also state if you are planning a holiday, sporting activity or any other surgery over the next few months, as we may need to book your toenail surgery for after these dates.

Alternative treatments

Sometimes it is possible to treat an ingrowing toenail by. On-surgical means before considering surgery. If you feel the podiatrist has not already discussed with you why alternative methods are not indicated for your toenail the please do not hesitate to ask further questions.

On the day of your appointment

You just ensure that you eat and drink normally, otherwise you may feel faint. Please remove any nail varnish or foot jewellery before attending your appointment. Please bring a list of any medication you are currently taking.

The podiatrist may not proceed sort the surgery on the day if there have been changes to your general health, medication, if you have had another local anaesthetic within the last 24 hours or if your toenail problem has significantly improved.

In the clinic the podiatrist will talk to you throughout the procedure to reassure you, answer any questions and help you relax if you are feeling nervous. You should expect to be with us for about an hour, although the procedure itself once the toe is numb only takes about twenty minutes.

After discussing your medical history, answering any further questions you may have and checking your consent form the podiatrist will ask you to lie down on the couch.

The first part of the procedure is the local anaesthetic injections to each side of the toe, which will numb your toe so that you do not feel any pain; although you will still be aware of other sensations such as hot, cold, movement and pressure.

The podiatrist will wear a sterile gown and gloves to help reduce the risk of infection. All instruments used in the procedure are also sterilised and items such as blades and needles are sterile, single use and disposed of after use.

Once the toe is numb, the podiatrist will carry out the procedure you have agreed to in order to remove the problematic nail (section). The nail bed is then treated with a chemical called phenol to prevent the nail or section of nail from growing back again. The podiatrist will then put a large dressing on your toe so you will need to bring a pair of sandals or loose shoes to wear home.

It is advisable for somebody to drive you home as the anaesthetised area may remain numb for around two hours after the procedure. It is important you are aware that it may affect your motor insurance. Unnecessary walking immediately after the procedure may increase the risk of excessive bleeding and delay healing.

Do not arrange to go back to work on the day of the procedure. It is advisable to rest your foot as much as possible for the rest of the day to reduce any post operative pain and risk of excessive bleeding. Furthermore, walking and standing should be kept to a minimum the following day for the same reasons. Depending on the nature of your occupation it may be advisable to take a few days off to recover.

You will be required to keep your dressing dry until your follow up appointment, at which point a fresh dressing will be applied. Your podiatrist will discuss any follow up appointments required and will explain how to redress the site yourself if required.

You may need to take a painkiller such as paracetamol once the anaesthetic has worn off (do not take aspirin as it may encourage bleeding).

Before leaving your surgery appointment you will be given a post operative care sheet which will explain the procedure in full and give details of who to contact should you have any problems or concerns.

Consent

The podiatrist will explain the procedure and aftercare in detail, including why the surgery should be undertaken, what the outcome should be and any possible risks associated with the procedure. You will the be given a consent form to sign to state that you are happy to go forward with the operation.

If you are under the age of sixteen years old somebody with parental responsibility must be available on the day of the operation to give written consent.

Possible risks associated with nail surgery.

Nail regrow the. In 5-10% of cases there can be nail regrowth. This will often be a small piece of soft nail, however if it is problematic the surgery may need to be repeated.

Delayed healing. Many factors affect the rate at which healing will occur following nail surgery. This is why we ask question relating to your lifestyle, occupation and health. The podiatrist will discuss any factors with you that may be of concern. Average healing times are between six to eight weeks for a partial nail removal and up to twelve weeks for a full nail removal.

Pain following the operation. Once the anaesthetic has worn off you may feel some pain or discomfort, in which case we advise you take your normal painkillers (not aspirin). It is also advisable to avoid pressure on the toe following surgery by wearing open footwear such as sandals.

Phenol burns. Occasionally phenol (the chemical used to stop the nail regrowing) can spread into the skin around the nail. This can cause pain and delayed healing. Every precaution is taken by your podiatrist to avoid this from happening.

Cracking of the toenail. Several weeks after the surgery to remove a section of nail, a split across the remaining nail may occur. This may then take several months to grow out and for the nail to reach its final appearance, which will be narrower than it originally was.

Infection. Every precaution is taken during the procedure to avoid infection with only sterile equipment and dressings being used. However when dealing with an open wound there is always a chance of infection. The presence of infection will make the toe painful, red, swollen, throbbing, inflamed and hot. It will also slow the healing of the toe.

If this occurs your podiatrist or other healthcare professional will give advice on the best treatment option, often anti-biotic are required.

Excessive bleeding. There is usually little bleeding during the procedure. However it is important to rest with your foot elevated for the remainder of the day to reduce post-operative bleeding.

Nerve damage. This may occur due to the use of a needle to administer anaesthetic or pressure on a nerve during the operation. Most nerve damage is temporary with recovery within three months.

Bone trauma. Very occasionally the injection or procedure may cause damage to the sheath around the bone causing pain and delayed healing.

Anaphylactic reaction - very rare risk.

As with any procedure in which anaesthetic is used there is a rare risk of an anaphylactic reaction. This is why you will be asked about any existing allergies or adverse reaction to anaesthetics in the past. Adrenaline is kept in clinic should such a reaction occur.

Other. Some medical condition will have associated risks with them with regards to your nail surgery. Your podiatrist will discuss these with you before surgery.

Quality of care.

We aim to carry out the procedure as efficiently and in as relaxed and calming atmosphere as possible. We endeavour to answer all of your questions and concerns to make comfortable and confident in our service.