

Education

Turf Toe

What is turf toe?

Turf toe is pain at the joint where the big toe attaches to the rest of the foot.

How does it occur?

Turf toe can result from excessive pushing off of the big toe when you run or jump. Jamming the toe into a hard surface can also cause turf toe.

What are the symptoms?

You have pain where your big toe attaches to your foot. You may have difficulty bending and straightening your toe. Your toe joint may be swollen.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will ask about your symptoms and examine your toe. He or she may order an x-ray to be sure you did not break your toe.

Turf toe can sometimes look like gout, a type of arthritis of the big toe. Your provider may order tests to be sure you do not have gout.

How is it treated?

Treatment may include the following:

- putting ice packs on your toe for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours for the first 2 to 3 days or until the pain goes away
- elevating your foot on a pillow
- taking anti-inflammatory medicines prescribed by your health care provider.

One of the keys to treating turf toe is keeping the toe from moving too much. Your toe can be taped to restrict how much it moves. You may have a special insole placed in your shoe that will reduce the movement of your big toe.

How long do the effects last?

The length of recovery depends on many factors such as your age, health, and if you have had a previous toe injury. Recovery time also depends on the severity of the toe injury. Pain from turf toe may last several weeks or longer. You need to stop doing the activities that cause pain until your toe has improved. If you continue doing activities that cause pain, your symptoms will return and it will take longer to recover.

When can I return to my normal activities?

Everyone recovers from an injury at a different rate. Return to your activities will be determined by how soon your toe recovers, not by how many days or weeks it has been since your injury has occurred. In general, the longer you have symptoms before you start treatment, the longer it will take to get better. The goal of rehabilitation is to return you to your normal activities as soon as is safely possible. If you return too soon you may worsen your injury.

You may safely return to your normal activities when, starting from the top of the list and progressing to the end, each of the following is true:

- You have full range of motion in the injured toe compared to the uninjured toes.
- You have full strength of the injured toe compared to the uninjured toes.
- You can walk straight ahead without pain or limping.

How can I prevent turf toe?

Turf toe is best prevented by wearing good shoes that fit properly and by avoiding jamming your big toe into a hard surface.

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