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Turf Toe

What Is Turf Toe?

Turf toe is a sprain of the big toe joint resulting from injury during sports activities. The injury usually results from excessive upward bending of the big toe joint. The condition can be caused from either jamming the toe or from repetitive injury when pushing off repeatedly when running or jumping. Although this injury is most commonly reported in football players, participants in soccer, basketball, wrestling, gymnastics and dance also are at risk.

Causes

The name “turf toe” comes from the fact that this injury is especially common among athletes who play on artificial turf. When playing sports on artificial turf, the foot can stick to the hard surface, resulting in jamming of the big toe joint. There has been some indication that less-supportive flexible shoes worn on artificial turf are also to blame.

Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of turf toe can include pain, swelling and limited joint movement.

If turf toe is caused by repetitive actions that cause injury, the signs and symptoms will usually begin slowly and can gradually worsen. Turf toe can also be caused by a direct injury leading to damage of the bone beneath the cartilage. If direct injury is the cause, the signs and symptoms may begin suddenly and get worse over a 24-hour period.

Diagnosis

To arrive at a diagnosis, the foot and ankle surgeon will obtain your medical history and examine your foot. X-rays are typically ordered to rule out any broken bone. Other advanced imaging studies may also be helpful for proper diagnosis.

Treatment


Initial treatments include rest, ice, compression, and elevation. (RICE), as well as a change to less-flexible footwear. Operative treatment is reserved for individuals with severe cases and prolonged pain.

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8725 West Higgins Road, Suite 555, Chicago, IL 60631-2724

Phone: (773) 693-9300 | (800) 421-2237 | Fax: (773) 693-9304 | E-mail [ACFAS](mailto:ACFAS@acfas.org)

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