Podiatry Services
Patient Information Leaflet

Curly or Overlapping Toes in Children
(V2 November 2026)

What are curly toes?
They are often present from birth (congenital) and commonly affect the 3rd, 4th or 5th toes on one or both feet. The movement of our toes is controlled by many tendons that run from the foot or calf to the toes. Although the cause is not full understood, congenital curly toes are thought to possibly develop because these tendons are too tight and pull the toe under the next toe and out of line.

What are the symptoms of curly toes?
The main symptom is the visible curling of one or more toes underneath the next toe. This may not cause any symptoms but you may notice your child developing areas of hard skin or rubbing of the toes, having difficulty wearing some styles of shoes or trouble finding suitable shoes that fit properly. Sometimes children can get pain with activity.

How common are curly toes?
It is one of the most common foot problems in children. It is common to be present from birth. It can often run in families.

What is the natural progression of this condition?
Some curly toes will naturally improve with time. If the toes remain flexible and supple the curly toes can sometimes remain but don't cause any problem. Sometimes the curly toe becomes fixed as the joint capsule becomes tighter, but there is no evidence that this will cause problems in later life.

What is the treatment for curly toes?
Curly toes can be left if they are not causing any problem. In addition, there is a potential for the toes to improve spontaneously with growth in the first 6-7 years of life. Simple non-operative measures such as shoes with extra space across the toes may be helpful and avoiding tight socks, hosiery and baby grows.

Stretching
In the first instance we always advice stretching out the curly toes to keep them supple. This can be done as part of a bed time or bath time routine. Some clinicians may advice taping to the adjacent toe to hold the curly toe out straight but there is little evidence to suggest this helps so may be of limited value…..the most important point is to reassure you that curly toes do not usually cause a problem.

Surgery
In a small number of cases where the curly toes is causing a significant impact on the child, or there are ongoing painful blisters and rubbing, surgery may necessary. A small procedure on the underside of the toe to release the tight tendon.

Nail and skin care
Ensure nails are correctly trimmed to prevent the nail digging into the next toe.
Ensure the skin in between the toes is kept clean and dried thoroughly after washing.

If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet, please contact Podiatry Services. Further information about the service and how to manage a range of foot health problems yourself, can also be found on our website:
www.livewellsouthwest.co.uk/project/podiatry

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