

“Bunion Surgery”

a text for interpreting practice in the
Classifiers in Context: Disc One, Medical Settings DVD-ROM
by Patricia Lessard

I am not sure exactly when I realized I definitely had a bunion forming on my left foot. All I know is over many years something had been slowly developing. My big toe no longer pointed straight ahead, but leaned into the toe next to it, and there was a bump at the base of it on the outside of my foot. Eventually it became painful - painful enough that I knew I needed to meet with a doctor.

I had a referral from a friend, so the first thing I did was to make an appointment with a podiatrist. He said I should come in for x-rays. It was at that time that he discovered that my left baby toe was also of concern. He said it was a hammertoe and really should be taken care of. It would be easier and cheaper if he took care of it at the same time that he took care of the bunion. This doctor was an expert in his field and he and his partner had developed a cutting edge technique for repairing bunions. We had a consultation so he could explain what he would do to fix the problems.

The bunion surgery would be an out-patient procedure that would take about one hour. The doctor would make a 3" incision beginning at the base of my big toe and extending down along the top of my foot. This would allow him to go in and re-align the soft tissue and bone to restore normal alignment to the joint. He would cut the bone where the toe joins the foot, and reposition the toe so it pointed straight ahead. Then, the joint would be stabilized with a screw to hold the bone in place for six months while it healed. Last, the incision would be stitched closed.

The hammertoe surgery would involve a 1" incision along the top of my baby toe, removal of one section of bone at the joint, and then the incision would be stitched closed.

The day finally came for me to have the surgery. I had to stop eating and drinking at midnight the night before my surgery so the sedation wouldn't make me sick to my stomach. My husband, David, drove me to the clinic for the outpatient surgery; we arrived at the surgery center early - 7:00 a.m. - because I had to be there one hour before the actual surgery. I registered at the admissions desk, filled out the

necessary paperwork, and then sat in the waiting room for a nurse to take me back to get prepped for surgery. When the nurse came to get me, my husband gave the desk his cell phone number so they could contact him when I was ready to leave. Then he left the clinic.

I changed into one of those awful hospital gowns that open in the back, and sat in a recliner type chair to wait for my doctor. When he arrived, he pulled up an adjacent chair and said hello. Then, without any explanation, he whipped out a permanent marker pen and made a blue dot on my left big toe and left baby toe. When I looked surprised, he explained that it was used to make sure he didn't mistakenly cut into the wrong toe.

After the doctor left, the anesthesiologist came by to set up the IV for sedation. While he was inserting the IV into the top of my hand, we discussed what options I had. I told him I wanted to sleep through the surgery and he agreed to keep the sedation on the heavy side so I wouldn't wake up before they were finished.

An orderly came to walk me into the operating room where three doctors, two nurses, and the anesthesiologist were waiting for me. Two of the doctors were students who wanted to observe the surgery. This was an unexpected request, but I gave them my permission to stay.

The anesthesiologist started the IV and told me to count backwards from ten. I remember counting to eight, and the next thing I knew, I was waking up in the recovery room. My surgery was finished by about 10:30 a.m.

I woke up in a bed in the recovery room and a nurse brought me some water to help me wake up. My foot was numb and encased in bandages. I was wearing a square rubber shoe with Velcro closures. I rested for a while, and nurse at the front desk called my husband to tell him to come back to get me. Soon David arrived. By this time they had already given me a prescription for pain medicine, and instructions for taking care of my foot. Ugly as it was, they said that the big, black, square shoe would protect my foot on all sides. I was to wear this shoe for eight weeks.

At home, I rested on the couch and took pain medication to be comfortable. As instructed by the doctor, I kept my foot elevated and only walked on it to make the occasional trip to the bathroom. Two days later, I went back to the doctor for a follow up visit to make sure everything was going along okay. The doctor checked me out and said my foot was doing just fine.

At first I walked without bending the foot - per the doctor. He said that later, I was supposed to walk normally on the foot as much as possible, to aid in recovery. During the surgery, the doctor had to sever nerves when he cut through the big toe bone. The initial recovery was painful but I was surprised how quickly that subsided. The most uncomfortable part was the tingling and shooting sensation I felt as the nerves began to heal and grow back.

For the first two weeks, the doctor said that I could not get my foot wet AT ALL! I was able to take a shower only by wearing a knee-high rubber boot. The boot looked too big and it was really baggy, but once

you put it on, you used a device - a rubber bulb with a flexible tube attached to it that you attached to a port in the boot. Then you squeezed the bulb with your hand to suck all the air out of the boot to make it water tight. It was a pain in the neck, but DEFINITELY much better than taking sponge baths for two weeks.

At the end of the two weeks, I went back to the doctor to have the stitches taken out. At that time he told me to apply something he called "Liquid Bandage" to protect the incision until it healed completely. It looked and smelled something like Crazy Glue. You brushed it on over the incision and it made a seal so that water wouldn't touch the incision and split the cut open. Now, at last, I could take showers without the rubber boot.

I followed my doctor's instructions and did as much walking as possible. I also stretched my big toe both upward and downward to keep it from becoming stiff. Six months after the surgery, I went back to the podiatrist's office to have the screw removed. This time, instead of being sedated, the doctor numbed my foot with a local anesthetic. This was the worst part of all. Having my foot numbed

meant enduring multiple injections in different areas of my foot to ensure I wouldn't feel the screw removal incision. This hurt more than anything else I had gone through!

My foot continued to heal and now it is almost as good as new. Once in a while it feels stiff, and I still have the occasional tingly nerve, but I am much more comfortable. I sure hope I don't develop one on the other foot, but if I ever have to do this again, at least now I know what to do. I kept that old square rubber shoe from the first surgery.

Guess I can dig it out of my closet and use it again. And I am sure it wouldn't take much practice for me to get good at putting on a rubber boot again, too.