



Your Big Toe Runs the Show

a George Russell
Video and Newsletter

Photo: Zachary Schulman



If foot comfort and joy have you living in blissful unawareness of your big toe and its influence on your happiness and body mechanics, I recommend that you stay that way. But if you know all too well the pain and privations that big toe pain and limitation cause - for example, not being able to wear three-quarters of the shoes in your closet and wincing or teetering when you try to crouch - then you don't even need this introductory paragraph.

The reason the big toe is so important is illustrated by the bland and generic photo above. In order to

- complete a step,
- crouch to pet your pet,
- walk backward on your tiptoes carrying a large statue (if you don't do that then refer back to the first two examples), and
- reach for something on a high shelf

you need that joint to bend backwards (extend) to just about the the "ankle angle" pictured.

If you can't bend that far with ease, you'll probably make an unconscious compensation that may lead to future woes. It can slow your gait, and cause problems all the way up your body to your neck. If, in addition, extending your toe hurts, you'll be even more behind the 8-ball.

Usually, the first effect of a non-extending big toe is changing where you place your weight in your foot as you stand and walk. Without weight on the big toe, you lose the power of your arch to absorb stress, and you put too much weight into parts of your foot - and your whole body - that aren't built to take it. Then you can get imbalances in the hip, S/I and thence up the whole spine.

I'm sad to say that in a couple of instances, I only realized after several sessions that a client had a big toe restriction. When that was set to rights, usually the client's pain complaints elsewhere got better.

Usually, a treatment and some education (and occasionally, orthotics) will help greatly with a big toe problem. And often, toe problems can be set to rights by taking your hands and moving the foot and toe around or by doing some exercises and mobilizations. Some of them are shown in the attached video. Try them out, and let me know if they work.

Big toe mobilization and exercise

https://vimeo.com/345485079/4e7f7d4522?utm_source=email&utm_medium=vimeo-cliptranscode-201504&utm_campaign=29220