

Ankle Fusion Surgery

Surgery is usually performed under a general anaesthetic. The procedure takes around 2 hours. Patients normally stay for 1 night after the operation following arthroscopic surgery, and 2-3 if the procedure is open.

Arthroscopic Technique

2 small incisions are made at the front of the ankle to allow the camera (arthroscope) and the instruments access to the ankle joint. Any remaining cartilage is removed as is the hard underlying bone by using motorised shavers. After preparing the joint, 2 screws are placed from the inner side of the shin down into the ankle through a 2cm incision. The tissues are then stitched and a below-knee half cast applied.

Open Ankle Fusion Technique

A 12cm incision is made, usually over the outer side of the ankle (this will depend on any associated deformity and may be on the front or inner side of the ankle). Any remaining cartilage is removed as is the hard underlying bone by using chisels. When the joint has been prepared 2 screws will be placed across the ankle joint. The screws are 7-8mm in diameter. The tissues are then stitched and a below-knee half cast applied.

Risks

All surgery carries potential risks. The risks are minimised by having the surgery meticulously performed by an expert in foot and ankle surgery. Risks include

Pain, swelling, and bruising - will occur to some degree following all foot and ankle surgery

Infection - approximately 2% in our unit

Blood clots (thrombosis) - treatment to reduce this risk will be provided if required

Numbness - can occur over the top of the foot, and usually improves over time

Stiffness - The ankle joint will be rigid following this operation. Other joints will be still following the surgery, but this will improve over time. Arthritis can develop in neighbouring joints, but this often takes over 10 years to occur.

Scar sensitivity - can be improved with scar massage

Delayed or non-union - the non-union rate (bones not healing together) is approximately 5% and is higher in people who smoke.

Discharge advice following ankle fusion

Dressings

Your leg has been dressed with a plaster back-slab to give it support. This dressing should not be changed until you are seen at your first follow-up appointment after 2 weeks. The plaster must be kept clean and dry.

Elevation

It is very important that you rest as much as possible and keep your foot elevated for the first 48 hours after surgery. Try to avoid letting it hang down when sitting as this will lead to swelling and pain. This is most apparent within the first 2 weeks but swelling may occur for up to 6 months after surgery, especially after sitting or standing for long periods. In bed, put the foot on a pillow.

Analgesia

You will receive a prescription for pain medication on discharge. Pain is often due to swelling, and this is eased by rest and elevation of the foot.

Walking

A physiotherapist will have shown you how to use crutches. You should not put any weight on the foot for at least 2 weeks.

Follow-up

You will be seen approximately 2 weeks when the plaster and sutures will be removed. At this stage a full fibreglass cast will be applied and you will be able to start putting a little weight through the foot. You will be seen again after 6 weeks when you will have an X-ray. If all is progressing well, you will start to take more weight on the foot. You will then be seen 12 weeks after the surgery. The foot will require immobilising for a total of 12 weeks.

Driving

You should not drive a manual car for 12 weeks following surgery. After this you should start gradually, to see if you are comfortable. It normally takes a few days to feel confident. If you have an automatic car and have only had the left foot operated upon then you may drive after 2 weeks.

Work

If you have an office based job then it may be possible for you to return after 2 weeks however it is more advisable to return after 12 weeks. If you have a more physical job then it may take 16-20 weeks.

Recovery

It often takes 6 months for all swelling to resolve and so minor swelling late in the day is not unusual and should not be a cause for concern.

For more information please contact us:

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or visit www.bfaclinic.co.uk