



PROTOCOL

Total Ankle Replacement Post-Op



This is a general outline; individual course of treatment can vary.

Type of procedure: In-patient (one to two day hospital stay) or outpatient

Length of procedure: Two hours

Anesthesia: General anesthesia with nerve block

General Recovery Facts

- You will not be walking on the leg for approximately four to six weeks. This may be longer if additional procedures are performed.
- You will need to use crutches, a walker or a scooter device called a roll-about during this period.
- There will be a splint bandage applied to the leg for the first week.
- The first follow-up appointment will be one week after surgery.
- Stitches, if used, are typically removed at approximately three weeks following surgery.
- After the sutures are removed, you will be placed into a removable boot.
- If the surgery is on the LEFT ankle, you should be able to drive an automatic vehicle at two weeks. If surgery is on the RIGHT ankle, you may drive at approximately six weeks after surgery.
- Range of motion exercises of the ankle and big toe are typically started after sutures are removed. You should remove the boot five times per day for five minutes to exercise, when instructed by your physician.
- You may begin walking on the leg and ankle at about four to six weeks in a boot. This time period may be longer if additional surgical procedures are performed.
- You may begin to walk without the boot in an ankle brace at six to eight weeks after surgery, depending on your level of discomfort and instructions given to you by your physician. This time period may be longer if additional surgical procedures are performed.
- Physical therapy is very helpful and usually begins at six weeks after surgery.
- You should plan to use a physical therapist for about two months.
- There will be moderate swelling of the ankle and leg for about six to nine months.
- You will continue to improve your strength and motion for about 12 months.

Exercise and Sporting Activities After Your Total Ankle Replacement

For many individuals, a return to an active lifestyle is the goal for this surgery. For some this may mean the ability to walk without pain and for others a more regular exercise routine may be more important. Regular exercise is always encouraged. Low impact activities such as a stationary bicycle, stair climber and elliptical machines are excellent to regain strength and motion of the ankle. Impact activities such as running or jumping are not recommended. You may however engage in golf, hiking, walking, bicycling or doubles tennis.



Specific Post-operative Recovery

Days 1–6

- Foot is wrapped in a bulky bandage and splint.
- Ice, elevate and take pain medicine regularly.
- Expect numbness in foot for 12-24 hours and then moderate to severe pain.
- Bloody drainage through the bandage is expected.
- Use crutches, walker or a roll-about knee scooter.
- Do not change the dressing/splint and do not get the leg and splint wet.

Days 7–10

- First office appointment.
- X-rays are taken; dressing changed.
- A compressive wrap or splint is applied. If swelling is minimal, a boot or cast may be applied.
- Your physician will tell you if you may begin weight bearing.

Week 3

- Sutures are usually removed.
- A removable postoperative boot is applied.
- Ankle range of motion exercises out of the boot are started. You will usually be asked to do calf-stretching exercises and write the letters of the alphabet with your foot. This should be done for five minutes, five times daily.
- Start exercises for motion of the big toe. It is common for the big toe to lose flexion and you should gently manipulate the big toe downwards three times a day to ensure it does not become stiff. Occasionally if the big toe is stuck and cannot bend down, your physician may manipulate it for you at the office.
- You can shower, provided the incision is clean and dry, apply antibiotic ointment to the incision as needed.
- At four weeks, you may use a stationary bike, but with no pressure or resistance on the ankle.
- Your physician will tell you when to begin weight bearing.

6 Weeks

- Full weight bearing is usually started if it hasn't already been instructed to do so. You should plan on being able to walk as long as there is no pain in the ankle.
- You will be given a prescription to start physical therapy.
- Attend physical therapy usually two times a week for about six to eight weeks. At about six to eight weeks post surgery, you may begin walking out of the boot in an ankle brace if comfortable.
- Increase activity according to instructions from your physician.

