

Total Ankle Replacement

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

This surgical fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional. If your injury or illness is critical or life threatening, call triple zero (000). To speak to a registered nurse, call healthdirect on 1800 022 222.

Notes and questions to bring to your doctor

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

For more help with what to ask your doctor, visit healthdirect.gov.au/question-builder

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This document will give you information about a total ankle replacement. If you have any questions, you should ask your GP or other relevant health professional.

What is arthritis?

Arthritis is a group of conditions that cause damage to one or more joints.

The most common type of arthritis is osteoarthritis, where there is gradual wear and tear of a joint. Some other types of arthritis are associated with inflammation of the joints. Arthritis eventually wears away the normal cartilage covering the surface of the joint and the bone underneath becomes damaged. This causes pain and stiffness in the joint.

What are the benefits of surgery?

You should get less pain and be able to walk more easily.

Are there any alternatives to ankle replacement?

Simple painkillers such as paracetamol and anti-inflammatory painkillers such as ibuprofen can help control the pain. Supplements to your diet may also help relieve your symptoms. Check with your doctor before you take supplements. Using a walking stick can make walking easier. A plastic splint or stiff ankle boot with a cushioned heel is sometimes helpful.

Regular moderate exercise can help to reduce stiffness in your ankle.

A steroid injection into your ankle joint can sometimes reduce pain and stiffness for several months.

An arthroscopy (keyhole surgery) to clean out your ankle joint can give some relief for 6 to 12 months.

All these measures become less effective if your arthritis gets worse.

What does the operation involve?

Various anaesthetic techniques are possible. The operation usually takes an hour to 90 minutes.

Your surgeon will remove the damaged joint surfaces and replace these with an artificial joint made of metal and plastic (see figure 1). Your ankle replacement is fixed to the bone using special coatings on the metal that bond directly to the bone.

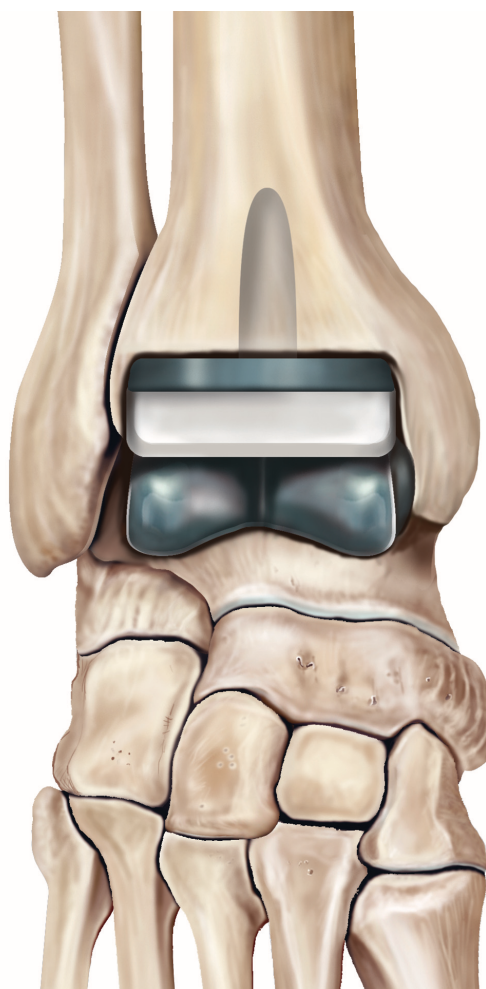


Figure 1

A total ankle replacement

What complications can happen?

1 General complications

- Pain
- Bleeding
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Unsightly scarring
- Blood clots
- Difficulty passing urine
- Chest infection
- Heart attack
- Stroke

2 Specific complications

- Damage to nerves
- Damage to blood vessels
- Slow healing of your wound
- Fracture
- Infection in your ankle
- Failure of your ankle replacement
- Continued discomfort

- Severe pain, stiffness and loss of use of your foot and ankle (complex regional pain syndrome)

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home after 2 to 5 days. To start with, spend most of the time with your leg raised on a chair or footstool. You will need to use crutches or walking sticks for a few weeks.

Once the plaster cast is removed, regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Most people make a good recovery, have less pain, and can move about better. An artificial ankle never feels quite the same as a normal ankle, and it is important to look after it in the long term.

An ankle replacement can wear out with time.

Summary

Arthritis of your ankle is often the result of previous ankle injuries or rheumatoid arthritis. If you have severe pain, stiffness and disability, an ankle replacement should reduce your pain and still give you some movement in your ankle.

Acknowledgements

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