



HOW TO BE NON-WEIGHTBEARING AFTER SURGERY

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE NON-WEIGHTBEARING?

If you're considering foot or ankle surgery, your foot and ankle orthopaedic surgeon may have said you'll need to be non-weightbearing for a period of weeks after your procedure. What does that mean?

The term non-weightbearing, sometimes prescribed simply as "N.W.B.," refers to restrictions placed on you immediately after surgery. You will be advised to avoid putting the surgically repaired foot on the floor. This typically means no weight whatsoever, not even for a second or two whether standing or seated.

Why is it bad for your foot to touch the ground after surgery?

Most people cannot accurately gauge how much weight they're putting on a foot even if they're just grazing the floor with it. Putting any weight on an operated foot or ankle can damage the repair that's been done. Bones need time to heal. Plates or screws that may have been added during surgery need the bones to heal around them. Adding weight too soon can interrupt this important internal healing process.

Equally important, surgical wounds heal better when they are not stressed by weight. Incisions such as those for an **Achilles tendon repair** or a fracture repair can particularly benefit from being non-weightbearing, but all procedures that involve surgical cutting need a period of no weight so incisions can heal.

In addition, a period of non-weightbearing also helps reduce swelling, which is common after foot or ankle surgery. Keeping swelling down will help tissues heal more quickly, and sometimes elevation helps control pain.

How will I get around?

If your foot and ankle orthopaedic surgeon has said that avoiding any weight on your foot is essential to healing, there are several options to consider.

Crutches

Many patients use **crutches** after surgery to keep their affected foot off the ground. The most common type, axillary crutches, are made of wood or aluminum and fit under the arms. Adjustment is important. You should be able to fit two fingers under your arm when standing with crutches. With your arms hanging down, the crutch handle should be at the crease of your wrist. For some patients, a standard walker may also be useful.

Knee scooter

Also known as a knee walker, the knee scooter is designed with a knee pad and wheels. You place your knee on the pad and roll yourself forward using handle bars to balance and steer. Brakes help keep the scooter stationary when you get off of it. Accessories can include a basket for stowing your cell phone or medication, a cup holder, and non-skid wheels. Knee scooters can be rented or purchased and may be covered by insurance.

Seated scooter

Narrower and lighter than a wheelchair, the seated scooter allows you to roll about from a seated position. And like the knee scooter, you get around using your own power, though some models come in powered versions. Similarly, accessories such as a basket and cup holder add to convenience. Brakes typically are standard, and seated scooters can be rented or purchased.

Following your surgeon's orders, especially when it comes to staying off of your operated foot or ankle, can make the difference between a normal healing period or a longer healing period with potential complications. Before your surgery, make sure you understand your surgeon's non-weightbearing instructions, particularly the length of time you'll need to avoid weight on your foot, and then plan ways to stay mobile during this time.

Contributors/Reviewers: Robert Gorman, MD; Jamal Ahmad, MD; Hui Zhang, MD

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American Orthopaedic Foot & Ankle Society®
Orthopaedic Foot & Ankle Foundation
9400 W. Higgins Road, Suite 220
Rosemont, IL 60018
800-235-4855 or +1-847-698-4654 (outside
US)

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