



HOW TO PREPARE FOR FOOT OR ANKLE SURGERY: AFTER SURGERY

PART 3: AFTER SURGERY

Use this three-part guide to help make your orthopaedic foot or ankle surgery and recovery go smoothly. You achieve the best results when you work with your foot and ankle orthopaedic surgeon to prepare for surgery and post-surgical recovery. Part 3 will focus on what to do in the days immediately after your surgery.

What kinds of symptoms can I expect after surgery?

Surgery can be a big stress to the body, so it is normal for you to experience the following symptoms after surgery:

- **Pain**, which will be worst in the first few days after surgery when the nerve block has worn off. As time passes and the body starts to heal, post-surgical pain lessens.
- **Swelling** of the surgical foot and/or ankle
- **Bruising and discoloration** of the surgical foot and/or ankle. Normal skin colors after surgery include blue, red, pink, purple, and brown. Skin colors that may be a sign of problems with circulation are pale white and dark black. Tell your surgeon immediately if you suspect circulation problems.
- **Blood or fluid leakage** from the surgical foot/ankle incisions. This tends to occur when one's foot swells after surgery.

- **Low-grade fevers** (less than or equal to 100.5 degrees) during the first week after surgery. Low-grade fevers that last after one week or those that are above 100.5 degrees at any time after surgery may not be normal. The surgeon should know about this immediately.

What modifications or accommodations are needed at my home after surgery?

After foot or ankle surgery, you will have restrictions placed on your operated foot or ankle and overall activity level. Due to this change in your activity level, you will have to adjust your daily routine at home. While every patient has a different living situation, some things can be done at home to make the post-surgical recovery time easier.

- If you live alone, it will be helpful if a close friend or relative can stay with you during the first several days after surgery. This friend or relative can help you get your home organized for doing things around the house.
- It is best to keep the entire home clean and organized to avoid injury. This includes decreasing clutter, removing loose wires and cords, securing rugs to the floors, and cleaning up spills immediately.
- At night, you should have the lights on as you move through the house. A nightlight can be very helpful in certain rooms like the bathroom and bedroom.
- For the bathroom, organize toiletries you use often so that they are in easy reach and not in cabinets or shelves that are either too high or too low.
- For the bedroom, organize clothes you wear often so that they are in easy reach. When getting dressed, place the surgical leg into clothes before the nonsurgical leg. When getting undressed, place the nonsurgical leg out of clothes before the surgical leg. Tight pants and/or socks can be uncomfortable against your post-surgical dressing and/or splint and should be avoided at this time.
- For the kitchen, organize foods you eat often so that they are in easy reach. The best types of foods to eat after surgery that help with healing include fruits, vegetables, nuts, lean meats and dairy items like milk and yogurt. It also helps to drink plenty of water and

electrolyte drinks (e.g., Gatorade) to stay hydrated after surgery. It can also help to prepare meals before surgery and store them in the freezer to be thawed out and eaten after surgery.

- When bathing, the surgical leg must be placed outside the bathtub. When showering, you must keep your post-surgical dressing and/or splint clean and dry. Covering the surgical leg with a large, snug plastic bag or commercial cast cover can do this. (Of note, Saran wrap or plastic wrap does NOT work). To keep weight off your surgical leg in the shower, you should sit on a shower bench or chair, which can be purchased from a surgical supply store or ordered online.
- After the nerve block has worn off, applying ice to the surgical leg can help to decrease pain after surgery. The ice should be placed in thin, but tight, bag and over a thin sheet which itself will be placed over your surgical dressing and/or splint. This is done to prevent your dressing and/or splint from getting soaked from the ice. In a pinch, frozen foods (peas/corn) can be used to cool the leg instead of ice. Mark them so they are not eaten after been frozen/thawed a number of times.
- When resting, keep the surgical leg elevated to decrease pain after surgery. If possible, it is best for the surgical leg to be positioned slightly above the level of your heart. This can be done by placing a few firm pillows placed under the surgical leg.
- When sitting, use firm chairs and place them in every room in the house. While sofas and recliners are good for resting, they are not as supportive for sitting or getting up to stand.
- Stairs can be challenging to use after foot or ankle surgery, but handrails can help provide body support. When going upstairs, the nonsurgical leg goes first and the surgical leg follows. When going downstairs, the surgical leg goes first and the nonsurgical leg follows.

Do I need to take blood-thinning medication after surgery?

The known risk of getting a painful blood clot or deep vein thrombosis (DVT) in your leg after orthopaedic foot or ankle surgery is very low. However, your foot and ankle orthopaedic surgeon may instruct you to do several things to make the chances of DVT occurring even lower. Such actions include:

- **Avoiding medicines like hormone replacement therapy and birth control pills**, which can increase the risk of getting a blood clot.
- **Avoiding nicotine-containing products**, which can increase the risk of getting a blood clot.
- **Staying relatively active after surgery.** While you may not be allowed to place weight on your operated leg after surgery, you may be encouraged to move around the house often. If allowed by the surgeon, you may also exercise your hips and knees with regular movements and stretching. Staying inactive and/or in bed can increase the risk of getting a blood clot.
- **Taking a medication like aspirin for a few weeks following your surgery.** Your surgeon may suggest this to further minimize your risk of developing a blood clot.

When does your surgeon next see you after surgery?

While every foot and ankle orthopaedic surgeon has different instructions, you will usually return to the office between one and three weeks after surgery for your first post-surgical visit. You should call your surgeon's office to schedule this appointment if it was not scheduled before surgery. If you have any concerns following your surgery, contact your surgeon's office.

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