

Foot and Ankle Surgery - Post-Operative Information

POST-OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS

These instructions are important in helping you rehabilitate from your surgery. Please follow them carefully. If there is anything you do not understand, please ask Dr Zilko.

Rest

It is very important that you rest and keep your foot elevated as much as possible for the first 10 days to encourage healing and discourage wound breakdown.

Pain Management

Pain is best treated before it arrives. A regular regime of pain killers taken in the post-operative phase is very important. Make sure you take a full dose of painkillers before going to bed on the night of your surgery, even if you are pain free, since the anaesthetic block will often wear off whilst you are asleep. It's recommended that you take regular analgesics 4–6 hourly initially, whilst pain is moderate to severe. After the first 2-4 days regular Panadol or Panadeine is usually adequate.

To ensure that suture & cast removal is comfortable, please take painkillers 2 hours prior to your first post-operative appointment.

If you have problems taking any of these medications, please let the medical staff know.

There is no need for you to be in constant pain.

Elevation

Swelling can delay wound healing and cause the wound to break down and become infected.

Swelling is normal after foot and ankle surgery, but can be worsened with over-activity and by not keeping your foot elevated.

Place your operated leg on two pillows or a bean bag so that it is, at a minimum, above the level of your hip when you are lying down. **It should preferably be above the level of your heart.** The more time you elevate the foot, the quicker the swelling will come down, and the less pain you'll have.

The use of ice packs (or frozen peas, beans etc.) can be a very effective way of reducing swelling. Place the ice pack in a towel over the ankle or foot for 20 minutes 3–4 times per day for the first 3-5 days after surgery.

Exercises

While you are resting it is important to do gentle range of motion and strengthening exercises. This promotes blood flow, muscle strengthening, and prevents joint stiffness. The exercises given to you by Dr Zilko or your physiotherapist are designed to assist with your rehabilitation and to gain the best results after surgery.

However, do not overdo it. Too much too early can be just as bad as not doing enough. This includes sport. Dr Zilko is happy to liaise with your trainers to get you back on the field as quickly as possible without compromising your recovery process and long-term health.

If you have been instructed to be 'non-weight bearing' this is to allow optimal healing of bones, tendons and ligaments. Failure to comply may jeopardise the results of your surgery.

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Dressings

Keep your bandages/cast clean and dry. Leave intact until your post-operative appointment (unless told otherwise by Dr Zilko).

When showering/bathing, wrap the dressings or cast in a plastic kitchen or garbage bag and seal the top of the bag above your dressings with tape or an elastic band.

If there is excessive bleeding or leaking through the bandages, or the bandages get wet, please contact the rooms and this can easily be re-banded if required.

Reducing Complications

Fortunately complications are uncommon. Nevertheless they do occur and you need to be aware of them. Several factors can increase your chance of having a complication. These include smoking, diabetes, and obesity. You can reduce this risk by quitting smoking prior to your operation, maintaining good blood sugar control, and losing weight.

FOLLOW-UP & TIME OFF WORK/DRIVING

Please call the rooms to make a post-op appointment for 2 weeks after surgery. This is to check the healing of your wounds and remove any stitches. The next follow up will usually be a further 4-6 weeks later to check further recovery.

If physiotherapy is required this will be arranged and discussed at your follow-up appointment.

Time off work and recovery will depend on the nature of your surgery. Generally a minimum of one to two weeks is required off for seated or desk work (unless very minor surgery). For more prolonged standing or walking this will often require at least 4-6 weeks off work.

Driving is not allowed in the first few days after surgery whilst on strong painkillers. If you've had surgery on your right foot or ankle then you generally need between 2 and 6 weeks off driving, depending on the procedure. If it's your left foot (and you drive an automatic car), you can usually drive 7-10 days after surgery.

POST-OPERATIVE PROBLEMS

If after reading and following the post-operative instructions you are experiencing any of the following problems, please call the rooms on 9489 8700:

Infection

- Wounds feel hot and tender.
- Unusual discharge from your wound or an odour from your dressings.
- Fevers, sweats and/or generally feeling unwell.

Swelling

- Swelling is not reduced with elevation of the leg.
- A change in the colour of your toes or coldness.
- The calf muscle in the lower leg of the treated foot swells or is painful.

Bleeding

- Your dressings are showing an excessive amount of fresh blood.
- Elevation and application of pressure dressings doesn't stop the bleeding.

Pain

- The medication that has been prescribed for you is not helping control the pain while you have been resting with your limb elevated.

Medication

- You are experiencing ill effects due to the prescribed medications (eg nausea, vomiting, stomach discomfort).



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