

# General Guidelines for Recovery After Foot or Ankle Surgery

In these past weeks, you have had a lot of anticipation with your surgery. You are now beginning a period of recovery. For the next 2-8 weeks, your surgical site will continue to heal. You must balance activity and rest. Do not try to overdo or push yourself beyond the limits of pain!

## Discharge Instructions

- You will be discharged about 1-4 hours after surgery or the next day if an overnight stay is required. When you leave the hospital will be determined by your doctor and the case manager. We will go over your discharge instructions with you and a follow-up appointment will be scheduled. Your follow-up appointments are **very important**.
- You will be given prescriptions for medicines you will need at home. Start taking any medicines you were taking before surgery, unless your doctor instructs you not to take them.
- You may need some help when you go home. We will help you decide what is needed. Some patients need to enter an extended care facility for additional therapy. If you need such therapy, your case manager and nurse will help with the arrangements. It is also very important to use your walking devices as instructed. While you are in the hospital, you may be provided with either special

**Learn more about your health care.**

equipment for home use or given a prescription to get the equipment from your local medical supplier.

### **❑ Symptoms to Report**

Please report any of the following signs to your doctor or surgeon.

- **Signs of infection:**
  - ▶ Redness
  - ▶ Swelling
  - ▶ Drainage at the incision site
  - ▶ Fever of 101 degrees or more
- **Signs of Decreased Circulation to the Ankle and Foot:**
  - ▶ Coldness of ankle and foot
  - ▶ Foot or leg turns pale
  - ▶ Tingling/ numbness
  - ▶ Increase in pain
  - ▶ Toenail beds turn blue in color

### **❑ Pain**

Your foot / ankle may be numb and painless for as long as 24 hours after surgery because of the local anesthesia used at the end of surgery. When this wears off, it is not unusual to feel moderate discomfort in the foot / ankle. Occasional feelings of pinching and pulling are to be expected. When you put your foot down, there may be a feeling of throbbing.

Elevate your legs and use an ice bag on your foot / ankle to help with the pain. Use your pain medicine in the first week after surgery. Do not wait for the pain to become intolerable before taking your pain medicine. You may have pain before it is time for your next dose of prescription pain medicine. If this pain occurs, call your doctor.

### **Swelling**

You may notice swelling in your toes and foot. This will occur usually in the first week after surgery and will cause a feeling of throbbing. Elevate your legs if the swelling and throbbing is uncomfortable. Make sure that the level of your foot is above the level of your waist.

You may go home with a cold circulation unit to help reduce your swelling and decrease your pain. This unit is an ice chest with a specially designed pump and cooling pad that helps keep a constant lower temperature around your surgery area. Once home, you will add ice and water to the ice chest and connect the hoses before you use the unit. Carefully follow the written instructions that come with the unit given to you.

### **Incision**

Depending on the area of your foot or ankle that was operated on, you may have either stitches or small staples.

## **Home Care**

### **Dressing**

Keep your surgical dressing on. Do not take it off. If it is loose, gets soiled or wet, or is damaged, call the office for instructions. The purpose of the dressing is to provide compression and soak up any discharge from the surgical incision. You may see some spotting or drainage on your dressing. This is not unusual. Call the office if the size of the spotting enlarges rapidly.

### **Infection**

You may have been given a prescription for antibiotics. It is always important to take all of antibiotics regardless of how well you feel. If you do not take all of the antibiotics you are given, you will run the risk of having an infection that is resistant to antibiotic therapy. If you use birth control pills to prevent pregnancy, you will need another contraceptive method **in addition to the pill** while taking an antibiotic.

## **❑ Bathing**

The bandages should not get wet unless instructed otherwise. You should not take a shower with a plastic bag over the bandage. A leak can develop, and if the stitches or bandages get wet an infection can occur. If only one foot was operated on, a bath can be taken by holding the bandaged foot out of the tub. Otherwise, it is necessary to take a sponge bath. If the bandage does get wet, call the doctor's office.

## **❑ Activity**

A special wooden shoe may be used after surgery to protect the foot. This should be worn when walking, but can be removed when resting. Certain procedures require that no weight be placed on the operated foot. Crutches or a walker can be used to help you get around as needed.

Casts may be used after surgery to help keep the position of the bones and protect the foot and leg. Casts are made of either plaster of Paris or fiberglass materials. They usually are kept in place for four to eight weeks. Some are non-weight bearing others are not. All casts should be kept dry unless instructed otherwise.

## **❑ Precautions**

- Call if you have any of the following warning signs.
  - ▶ Sudden unexpected increases in pain.
  - ▶ Any fall onto your foot / ankle.
  - ▶ Sudden color changes to your toes.
  - ▶ Foul odor coming from your dressing.
  - ▶ Temperature over 101 degrees for more than 1 day.

❑ **Follow-up**

You will follow up with your surgeon 1-2 weeks after surgery. Your sutures / staples may be removed and a new dressing, cast, or some type of device to keep your foot or ankle from moving may be applied.

If you do not already have a follow-up appointment scheduled, or if you have any questions about your post-operative symptoms, please call the doctor's office.

- **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: [health-info@osu.edu](mailto:health-info@osu.edu).**