

## **Ankle Replacement Postoperative Protocol**

Dr. Levi Kindel

**Disclaimer: Individual patient factors and/or adjunctive procedures performed during the operation should be considered in developing a patient specific recovery protocol. This is a guideline protocol that should be discussed by your surgical team.**

### **General**

- You will be in a hard plaster splint for the first 10-14 days after surgery.
- After 14 days, you will be placed in a night splint which you will wear day and night for 6 -10 weeks.
- You'll be doing weight bearing motion exercises, if the incisions are healed beginning at 10-14 days.
- You will be given a boot brace but not putting weight on the ankle during walking until 6 weeks.
- *Elevation and rest to allow for recovery is important for 12 weeks!!*
- If you have surgery on your right ankle, you will not be able to drive for six weeks.
- You will use crutches, walker, knee scooter (roll-a-bout), or wheelchair for at least 6 weeks.
- The operation will be 75% healed in 3 months and 90% healed by 6 months. Further recovery will take one to two years.

### **Special Precautions**

- If you suddenly develop increasing pain, swelling, redness and or warmth in the ankle that does not respond to rest, let us know. This can be a sign of infection, blood clot or fracture.
- Chest pain, difficulty breathing and/or shortness of breath require immediate medical attention by the physician or emergency department. This can be a traveling blood clot, pneumonia or heart attack.
- Infections elsewhere in your body must be treated as they can travel to the ankle.
- Occasionally, additional procedures may be needed to treat wound problems, infections, fractures, painful hardware, impingement, nerve issues, soft tissue tightness or looseness, or address alignment or other joint conditions.

## Postoperative Course

### Day 1

The foot will be wrapped in a plaster splint with lots of padding and a removable bandage. If for any reason your splint is uncomfortable or too tight, remove the ace wrap, loosen padding, and re-apply to your comfort level. Leave the deeper dressing on the skin intact. NOTIFY the surgical team if this is needed, especially if symptoms remain.

- It is important to ice and elevate the foot, take pain medication, and rest as needed.
- Expect numbness in the ankle for 4-12 hours and then anticipate the onset of pain.
- No weight bearing on the operated foot and ankle is permitted.
- Do not get the ankle or splint wet.
- Besides the incisions on the leg ankle and foot, there *may* be a small incision by your pelvis to take bone marrow or graft. This will be used in your ankle to help healing.
- Pain pills usually a narcotic (e.g. oxycodone) and an antihistamine (e.g. hydroxyzine) to decrease nausea and itching are prescribed.
- Additional medications for pain may be recommended including:
  - Acetaminophen (Tylenol) 1000 mg every 8 hours. Total daily dose not to exceed 3000mg.
  - Ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) 200 mg one to four tablets if the pain is not controlled. Total daily dose not to exceed 2400mg.
- Movement and exercises of the knees, hips, other foot and upper extremities to minimize blood clots is emphasized at least five times a day for 20 minutes at a time.

### Day 4

- Pain should improve after the 3rd day. If your pain has worsened since day 3 or you have a fever and/or chills, please call the office.
- Wiggle toes and move foot around in splint as tolerated.
- Perform isometric calf contractions.
- Continue to work the knee, hip, and upper extremities.

### Day 10 – 14

- First post-operative visit in the office.
- Your sutures will be removed, and the dressing will be changed.
- You will be placed in a boot brace with your ankle in a neutral position to control range of motion during early walking.
- You will also be provided or shown how to purchase a night splint on amazon.com or another web site. (Search “Night Splint or Posterior Night Splint for Plantar Fasciitis” approximately \$20)



You will need to sleep in the night splint for 12 weeks post-operatively. This protects the repaired ankle ligaments during while you are at rest or sleeping.

- **We don't recommend using the boot brace when resting or sleeping as it can rub the incisions.** When you are not moving around, use the night splint instead of the boot.
- Begin to do deep knee bends (weight bearing ankle dorsiflexion exercises) out of the boot 5 times a day for 20 minutes each session. This exercise is crucial in your recovery and is essential to regaining range of motion and strength of the ankle. Continue doing this exercise for the next 3 months as a daily routine.



- You will be shown how to perform basic range of motion ankle exercises.
- Avoid twisting the ankle.
- If the incision is healing well, you may begin to get the ankle wet in the shower 2-3 days after your post-operative visit.
- Keep the incision area dry and clean.
- If you notice increasing pain, redness, swelling or leaking of the wound: contact us or your surgeon immediately.

### 3 weeks

- If the incision is healed, you may submerge the ankle in water.
- Continue the knee bends 5 times a day for 20 mins.
- Wear the night splint except when doing the knee bends.
- When moving around maintain no weight on the ankle and use the boot with crutches, walker, knee scooter or wheelchair.
- Gentle exercise on a stationary bike may be permitted in the boot.
- 6 weeks
- Progressively increase weight bearing in the boot brace. Do five sessions of weight bearing for 20 mins. Start with 20 lbs. of weight on the limb.
- Add 20 lbs. every other day as tolerated until you are full weight bearing.
- In between weight bearing walking episodes, use the walker, crutches or roll-a-bout.
- You may be permitted to drive out of the boot.
- Wean off of the crutches or roll-a-bout as tolerated.
- Continue to use the night splint.
- Continue to avoid twisting of the ankle.

### 3 months

- Wean out of the boot brace as tolerated over the next 3 months. You will be given a cloth brace to wear during long periods of walking and exercise.
- Avoid walking on uneven or rocky terrain.
- Exercise on a stationary bike or elliptical is permitted without the boot brace.
- Continue increasing your activity as tolerated.

### 6 months to 2 years

- Follow up every 6 months and check x-rays.
- Continue increasing your activity as tolerated.

Reference: Schon L, Institute for Foot & Ankle Reconstruction at Mercy. Baltimore, MD: Mercy; 2024.