

Ankle Arthroscopy: A Guide to Recovery After Surgery

Arthroscopic Ankle Surgery is done to examine the ankle joint and to do surgery such as 'clean up' the joint, remove pieces of bone, bone spurs or cartilage, or address other problems.

During the surgery, a lighted telescopic lens called an arthroscope is inserted directly into the ankle joint to see what is happening in the joint. Several small cuts are made in the skin. These cuts are used to insert the arthroscope and surgical instruments into the ankle.

Ankle arthroscopy is performed in the operating room. Usually, general anesthesia is used, but sometimes spinal "freezing the legs" or block "freezing the ankle" anesthesia is used. The surgery takes between 30-90 min. Ankle arthroscopy is day care surgery meaning you go home the same day as the surgery.

Going Home:

- Arrange to have someone take you home after surgery

Bathing:

- If your ankle is in a half cast or splint, please leave it on and keep it clean and dry. Cleanse around the area or use a plastic bag sealed with duct tape to keep the dressings dry. If your cast becomes wet, please contact your surgeon.
- If you have a soft dressing on, keep your dressings dry for the first 5 days after surgery. Cleanse around the area or use a plastic bag sealed with duct tape to keep the dressings dry. 5 days after surgery, you may change your dressing if you wish.
- If the dressings get wet, change them
- If your wound does not have any fluid coming out of it, you may get the wound wet in the shower 5 days after surgery

- You may bathe 2-3 weeks after surgery, if the wound is healed and dry

Care of your Incision & Wound:

- You do not need to change your dressings if you do not want to -- you can just leave them clean, dry and covered until your follow up appointment 10-14 days after surgery
- The tensor band should be snug but not too tight. If the tensor is applied too tight (causes tingling or change in skin colour), loosen and reapply
- If the tensor is too loose, take it off and re-wrap it snugly
- If you want to get your leg wet in the shower, you may do so 5 days after surgery if the wound is dry
- Take the dressing off before you shower and put a new dressing on after your shower

How to change your dressings:

- Wash your hands with soap & water before you take care of your wound
- Remove tensor bandage
- Throw out the white gauze bandages—the dressings will be stained with blood - and remove the white mepore dressings.
- Do not remove the Steri-Strips- small tapes that are right on top of the wound. They will fall off themselves.
- Cover wounds with new dressing. Apply new 'mepore' or waterproof 'aquacell' dressing.
- Buy 'mepore' dressings at pharmacy. You must apply a new mepore dressing after each shower.
- Buy waterproof 'aquacell' dressing at One Bracing @ Rebalance^{MD}. You may shower with the aquacell dressing on.

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- After you change your dressing, put the tensor back on starting to wrap the leg below the knee and then work your way up.
- The tensor band should be snug but not too tight. If the tensor is applied too tight (causes tingling or change in skin colour), loosen and reapply
- If the tensor is too loose, take it off and re-wrap it snugly

Weight bearing:

- Follow your surgeon's instructions
- Some patients are asked to stay off the ankle 'non-weightbearing' and use crutches.
- Other patients are told to walk on the ankle as is comfortable. Crutches or canes may be used for comfort but are optional.

Activity:

- Slowly restart your regular activities
- Elevate your foot so that it is at the level of the heart for the 48-72hrs after surgery
- If swelling increases following activity, rest and put your foot up
- Discuss when to return to sport with your surgeon

Pain:

- Discomfort will be moderate for the first few days and will gradually get better
- Use pain medications as instructed by your surgeon
- Gradually reduce pain medications as your pain decreases

Swelling

- Expect swelling for a few weeks following the surgery. This is due to inflammation and fluid that was introduced into the joint during surgery
- When resting, sit with your ankle elevated.

Icing:

- Apply ice packs or use a cryo therapy 'ice machine' to reduce pain and swelling
- Apply ice for 10-15 minutes, 4-6 times per day
- Never apply ice directly to skin

Return to Work:

- When you are able to return to work depends on:
 - the kind of job you have and its physical demands
 - how much pain & swelling you have after your surgery
 - how your recovery is progressing
 - if you are able to modify your job or work from home
- Your surgeon will help you decide when to return to work
- Expect to take off at least 1-4 weeks for a desk job that does not require much walking
- Expect to take off 2-4 months for more physically demanding work

Healthy Eating:

- Start with clear fluids after surgery
- Gradually increase to a well balanced diet as your appetite allows
- Drink at least 6 cups of fluids daily

Going to the Bathroom:

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- Changes in medications, activity and diet can cause constipation (hard, dry bowel movements)
- To avoid constipation: drink lots of fluids, eat high fibre foods such as prunes, fruits, bran, whole grains and vegetables
- Take a stool softener or laxative if needed. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to suggest one.

Smoking:

- Smoking causes problems with the healing of bones and tissues
- Not smoking or smoking less in the 3-6 months after surgery will reduce the chance of a problem with healing
- visit www.quitnow.ca for information about tools and medications to help you quit smoking

Driving:

- Do not drive while taking pain medications.
- Discuss with your doctor when it is safe to drive

Your Medications:

- Resume your regular medications unless instructed otherwise by your doctor

Supplies/special equipment:

- **Crutches** are usually required and can be obtained from a medical supply store, some pharmacies or One Bracing @ Rebalance^{MD}
- **Cryotherapy "ice machines"** are optional but can be helpful to reduce pain and swelling. These can be bought at One Bracing @ Rebalance^{MD} or other medical supply stores such as McGill & Orme, Island Orthotics and others

- **Bauerfeind Malleotrain:** This is a compression sleeve for the ankle that helps control swelling after ankle injuries. Many patients find that they have swelling for months after the injury and like to have a light supportive brace to help the ankle feel more secure and control swelling. This can be obtained from One Bracing @ Rebalance^{MD}

Follow Up Appointment:

- A post-operative appointment should be scheduled for approximately 10-14 days after surgery
- Call the office if you do not have an appointment scheduled
- Write down your questions for the doctor before the appointment

Call your Surgeon if you have:

- Worsening pain or swelling that does not get better with elevation and ice
- Incisions that are red, puffy, hot or leaking fluid more than 48 hrs after surgery
- Fever greater than 38.5°C
- Signs of circulation problems in your leg (e.g coolness, change in skin colour, numbness) which is not relieved by loosening the tensor and elevating

If you cannot reach your Surgeon:

- Call your family doctor, go to a walk-in clinic or hospital emergency department

Non-emergency health information and services:

- HealthLinkBC www.healthlinkBC.ca

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- Tel: 811 from anywhere in BC
- Tel: 711 for deaf and hearing impaired assistance (TTY)

The information in this handout is intended only for the person it was given to by the health care team. It does not replace the advice or direction given to you by your doctor.