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Information Sheet

TOTAL ANKLE REPLACEMENT

What is a Total Ankle Replacement?

This is a procedure to replace the bones that form the ankle joint. It involves resurfacing the bones of the ankle joint (the tibia and the talus) with metal implants (see x-ray, right). A plastic meniscus is then placed between the two metal components, to provide a moving surface for the joint.



Why should I have an Ankle Replacement?

Almost always, the reason this procedure is carried out is to relieve the symptoms of painful arthritis, which can be either osteoarthritis (wear and tear) or an inflammatory arthritis (such as Rheumatoid arthritis). Unlike an ankle fusion, the ankle replacement aims to preserve the up and down movement of the ankle joint, thereby maintaining a more normal walking pattern and reducing the risk of secondary overload of adjacent joints, something that can occur if the ankle is fused.

What is the recovery like?

In general, patients are in hospital for two or three days. You will be in a plaster for two weeks after surgery and will not be allowed to put the foot to the floor for that period. If, at two weeks, the wound is healing well and the x-ray looks good, you will be put into a removable boot. At this point, you will begin working on the movement of the joint with the physiotherapists and starting to take weight through the leg when you walk. At six weeks, a further x-ray is taken and you may at that point come out of the boot completely and begin to walk more normally. You may also begin to drive if all is well. Recovery is, of course, variable from person to person, and it can take up to six to twelve months for the aches and pains and swelling from surgery to settle.

Which Ankle Replacement will I have?

At The Dorset Foot & Ankle Clinic, we have considered all the types of ankle replacement available. We believe that the Mobility Ankle Replacement (De Puy – see picture, right) is currently the best available, and it is this implant that we use at present.



Are there any potential complications?

There are risks with all surgical procedures. Risks of severe complications are increased in heavy smokers, and if there is significant deformity in the ankle. Surgery is performed under a general anaesthetic. With modern techniques, the risk from the anaesthetic itself is now very low. There are also general risks of the surgery, which include infection, pain, swelling, stiffness, blood clots, fracture of the bones around the ankle, nerve and blood vessel damage and a risk that the surgery may not fully cure the pain.

Specific to the ankle replacement itself, there is a risk that the implant can fail. The technique of ankle replacement is a relatively new one, and long term results with the Mobility are only available to around five or six years. Early results are, however, very promising. Should the implant fail, then it may need to either be revised to another ankle replacement, or converted to a fusion. This can be an extremely difficult procedure, which itself carries significant risks. The vast majority of our patients, however, have had very successful outcomes.