

Ankle fusion

What is an ankle fusion?

An operation is done to remove the cartilage (a tough elastic tissue) from between the bones of your ankle. Bone grafts taken from the hip bone are then put between the surfaces of the bones which then stick (fuse) together. Ankle fusion is also known as ankle arthrodesis.

Why do I need this?

This procedure is done for a painful arthritic ankle joint, where other treatment options like joint replacement is not suitable and more conservative treatments such as anti-inflammatory medication, anaesthetic injections and arthroscopy have been tried without success. The overall aim is to reduce the pain caused by the arthritis. The ankle joint is made completely stiff, but you will still be able to move the joint below the ankle and the joints in the foot.

How is it done?

This is done either by opening the ankle joint or through keyhole operation, depending on the individual circumstances. Fusion done through keyhole operation does not require a bone graft.

An incision (cut) is made over the front of the ankle. The damaged joint surfaces are prepared and packed with bone graft, if necessary, at the same time of this operation. The bone graft is taken either from the hip bone (iliac crest) or shin bone (tibia). An additional incision is made over the donor site (either hip bone or shin bone) to remove bone graft which will help in fusion of the joints. The joint is then held together with screws.

The operation takes about 1½ to 2 hours and is done under a general anaesthetic (you are asleep) or a spinal anaesthetic (you are awake but the area is numbed and you may be drowsy).

You will be admitted on the day of operation and kept in for 1 or 2 nights depending on the pain control and mobility.

After the operation

You will have moderate to severe pain to the scale of 8/10 and will be given adequate painkillers. You will need some painkillers for the first few days. You need to keep the foot elevated for the first few days until the swelling settles.

Your leg will be in plaster or a boot for 6 to 12 weeks. You will be on crutches without putting any weight on the operated leg for a period of 6 to 12 weeks.

You will then be followed up in clinic in 10 to 14 days to check the wound and change the plaster and again at 6 weeks and 12 weeks to assess the healing. The foot needs to be protected until the bones have fused which sometimes takes longer than 12 weeks.

You may need 12 weeks of time off work depending on the nature of your job.

You won't be able to drive until you can do an emergency stop without any pain in the foot.

What risks are there involved in the procedure?

- Infection
- Nerve damage – causing numbness and painful scar
- Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism (PE) – blood clots in the vein or lungs – very rare
- Non-union (where the bone grafts don't 'take')

If there is anything you do not understand or if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to discuss them with your doctor or nurse.

Where to get further information

Adult Day Surgery Unit:	0118 322 7622
Redlands Ward:	0118 322 7484 / 7485
Pre-operative Assessment:	0118 322 6546

For more information about the Trust visit our website www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

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