

Ankle lateral ligament repair / reconstruction

This leaflet will explain what will happen when you come to the hospital for an operation to repair or reconstruct an unstable ankle lateral ligament.

Why is surgery required?

Surgery is considered when you have an unstable ankle (ankle 'gives way') that does not respond to non-surgical treatment. Four to six months of non-surgical treatment (physiotherapy and ankle rehabilitation) is often recommended before surgery. The goal of this surgery is to restore stability to the ankle.

Patients with nerve or collagen diseases may not be helped by this type of surgery. Other diagnoses, including ankle joint arthritis, may require different surgeries that treat the bones and joints. Chronic pain does not necessarily improve following surgery even once ankle stability has been restored.

How is the operation done?

You will be admitted on the day of operation. The operation takes about one hour and is routinely done under a general anaesthetic (you are asleep) as a day case procedure. Occasionally a spinal anaesthetic (you are awake but the area is numbed and you may be drowsy) may be considered.

This procedure is often combined with an arthroscopy (keyhole) of the ankle. The 'keyhole' operation is undertaken first to identify and deal with any problems with the joint. In some patients, an associated joint problem may be present (e.g., cartilage damage) that may not have been detected on your pre-surgery MRI scan.

Following the arthroscopy (done through two small incisions) the lateral ligaments are reconstructed through a separate cut on the side of the ankle. Your existing ligaments are repaired / reattached with a bone anchor / stitches. This repair is often made stronger by support from other tissues. This is referred to as the modified Bröstrom procedure. Very occasionally, a tendon may be used to replace the torn ligaments.

The wounds are closed with dissolvable stitches. Your ankle will be protected in a below-knee back slab.

After the operation

Pain can be moderate to the scale of 4-5 out of 10. You will need some painkillers for the first few days. It is important to keep the leg elevated as much as possible especially for the first 2 weeks.

You will usually be able to go home when you feel ready. You will need to arrange for someone to drive you home. You should try to have a friend or relative stay with you for the first 24 hours. You will be non-weight bearing on the operated leg for 2 weeks. After that, you will be placed in

a boot / plaster and allowed to weight bear. After 6 weeks, your boot / plaster would be removed and rehabilitation commenced.

Your first clinic follow-up appointment is usually 12 to 14 days after surgery.

Wound care – The ankle would be protected in a back slab for 2 weeks. This should be kept dry. At the first clinic appointment, your wound is inspected and stitches are removed.

Work – If you have a sedentary job you should be able to return to work within 2 weeks (if you can arrange safe transport). If your job is physical, you may need to stay off work until the boot is removed.

Recovery period – This procedure has a lengthy recovery and will take 6 to 9 months to achieve its maximum potential benefit.

Sport – You should avoid sport for at least 2 months following surgery. When to return to sport after that depends on the speed of recovery and type of sport (contact sport should be avoided for up to 4 months). Essentially, you should not take part in sports until there is no further swelling within the joint and the leg is strong enough to exercise on comfortably. Advice from the doctor or physiotherapist is important in this regard.

Driving / travel – You will not be able to drive until the cast / boot is removed, so may take up to 10 weeks (The only exception is if you drive an automatic AND your LEFT ankle is operated on; you may start driving 2 weeks following surgery). **It is advisable to check the terms of your car insurance to ensure your cover is valid, as some policies state that you must not drive for a specific time period after an operation.**

It is important to stress that prolonged journeys, are not recommended for a fortnight after surgery, and air flight is strongly discouraged for up to 6 weeks after surgery.

Preparing for your surgery:

Non-weight bearing means putting no weight through the foot. Hopping is very energy consuming and tiring. If you are young and fit hopping with crutches and hopping up stairs may be possible. However, if you are older, frail or have medical conditions that affect your balance or ability to hop on one leg mobilising non-weight bearing will be very difficult if not impossible. If you struggle to mobilise even short distances with a frame you will be unable to manage the stairs.

Mobilising on one leg severely curtails normal activities such as cooking, making hot drinks, washing and dressing. Prior to coming into hospital you should arrange where possible to have someone stay with you during your recovery period or to stay with friends or relatives. If you live in a house and you suspect stairs are going to be difficult you should arrange for a bed to be brought downstairs (this cannot be done by the hospital). If you have more than one step at the front or back door you may find that it is difficult for you to access your house and you may wish to consider staying elsewhere.

It might also be a good idea to stock the freezer with pre-prepared meals that can be reheated or microwaved. Bear in mind that you will not be able to carry anything while mobilising non-weight bearing so preparing an area close to the microwave/cooker where you can eat your meals may be a good idea.

As this is planned surgery the hospital does not provide equipment except walking aids. If you don't have a downstairs toilet and you think you won't be able to manage the stairs then a commode is recommended. If you do have a downstairs toilet a glide-about commode (a commode on wheels) will allow a carer to push you to the toilet. A perching stool will also allow you to sit to have a strip wash, to clean your teeth, prepare and eat meals in the kitchen.

This equipment can be loaned from the Red Cross or other mobility agencies; ask your pre-op nurses for information or contact the occupational therapists on the number at the end of this booklet.

Please note: Community hospitals or community rehab teams do not accept patients who are non-weight bearing.

Leaving hospital

After your operation you will be discharged home. If a package of care is required to assist with personal care i.e. washing and dressing as you have no support at home this will be arranged prior to discharge. Depending on circumstances you may be expected to arrange and pay for this yourself.

Even once the boot is removed and you are allowed to fully weight bear on the leg it may be several weeks before you feel completely comfortable. As a consequence of this you may need some assistance for 6-8 weeks.

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.
- Rupture of the reconstruction.
- Prolonged swelling and stiffness.
- Residual pain and instability.

It is beyond the scope of this document to identify all the most extreme (less than one in a thousand) risks that you might be prone to but we will be very happy to discuss any worries about specific concerns and also about any family history or your own personal history of problems in the past which are much more relevant. 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.

Useful numbers and contacts

Adult Day Surgery Unit:	0118 322 7622
Redlands Ward:	0118 322 7484 / 7485
Pre-operative Assessment:	0118 322 6546
Occupational Therapy	0118 322 7560
Physiotherapy	0118 322 7812

Any concerns you may have during the first 24 hours following your discharge from hospital please telephone the ward you were on. After 24 hours please contact your GP.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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