



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Recovering from your operation

Issued by Podiatric Surgery Department

Wound care

Usually as long as your wound has not been infected it should heal within 2 weeks of the operation. You will find, however, that your skin will be quite dry and you will need to use a moisturising cream on it. It is best to use a bland, unscented cream and for the first week after you are out of dressings, avoid applying cream directly over the surgical wound. You should avoid the temptation to pick at dry blood and scabs on the wound, these will naturally come away with bathing and moisturising.

It is alright to bathe your foot, but you should avoid swimming in a swimming pool for about 4 weeks after your operation. When you first bathe this should be limited to a brief shower. You can fully immerse the foot in water a week after your dressings have been removed.

Back to shoes

After wearing a surgical shoe for 2 weeks you can then begin returning to normal shoes (for patients having complex or multiple procedures this may take longer). Most people find that loose lace up shoes are the most easy to get on, supportive shoes such as trainers will help to control swelling and improve comfort.

Sometimes patients find they need to obtain a slightly bigger fitting shoe to use for a few months after surgery because of the natural post-operative swelling. The worst thing you can do for your recovery is to wear a sandal or very loose fitting shoe as this will not compress the swelling and it will allow your foot to remain swollen for many months.

Swelling and discomfort

After undergoing a major foot operation it is quite normal to expect some pain in the foot for up to three months following the operation.

As long as the pain is not worsening, this is quite normal. You will find that your foot will ache the more you do on it because this will tend to increase the swelling.

Swelling in your foot will be present for many months after the operation and this will be the cause of most discomfort and inconvenience to you. The swelling will prevent you from wearing certain shoes and will also give rise to aching within the foot. This tends to improve gradually but can persist for 9-12 months following your surgery.

Whenever you are sitting, you should elevate your leg – this will help reduce swelling. Also pay attention to footwear, supportive shoes are best. The use of ice packs for 10 minutes at a time can help reduce discomfort after exercise.

Loss of sensation

There will always be some loss of sensation and numbness around the operation site. This tends to be most noticeable in the first two or three months after the operation but after a year or so can diminish and normal sensation can return.

How much walking should I do?

You will actually be the best judge of how much walking and exercise you can do. If you do too much your foot will tend to swell and ache even more. Try to walk as normally as you can, your foot will naturally want to avoid using the surgical area fully. To start with this is fine, but can cause other foot and leg pain if it continues.

When walking on stairs make sure your whole foot is on the step, for added safety.

As a rough guide split your day into hours, for each week after your operation you can increase your activity by 5 minutes per hour. So in week 1 you can do 5 minutes activity each hour and rest for 55 minutes, by week 3 you can do 15 minutes activity per hour with 45 minutes of rest and so on.

If you have been given crutches, you should only need to them in the first two weeks after your operation. It is usually a good idea to stop using them after this point as this encourages a return to a normal walking pattern. If you feel that you need them for a short while longer it is acceptable to do so. Sometimes patients find it easier to use one crutch on the non-operated side at this point.

Back to work

Usually most people can begin returning to work between six and eight weeks after their operation. The usual minimum time off work is four weeks. When you do return to work you should try and organize that you have quite light duties or a phased return. You will find that the foot will become more swollen and painful by the end of the day, particularly if you spend a lot of time on your feet at work. Continue to elevate the foot when resting.

Foot exercises and mobilizing the joints of your foot

It is essential that you begin moving the joints of the foot as soon as possible after surgery. If you do not move the joints they will tend to stiffen up and this in itself can be a cause of pain and swelling. You will be shown specific exercises to do at two weeks after your operation to try and restore movement to the joint, but walking is probably one of the best exercises to restore normal movement to the foot. You should try and walk as normally as possible and avoid guarding the foot as this can give rise to secondary problems, such as swelling and pain in the ankle and leg.

And finally, most of all be patient!

Following major foot surgery it can take up to a year to return to entirely normal. If, however your foot is not progressing and you feel that things are deteriorating or if you develop sudden and severe pain in your foot you **MUST** return to the clinic by contacting the Podiatric Surgery team via the secretary.

Contact Numbers

1st contact point:

Podiatric Surgery office
01434 655638

Monday – Friday: 8am-4pm

Orthopaedic Helpline:

(Office hours, Monday to Friday)

North Tyneside General Hospital
0191 2934220

Wansbeck General Hospital
01670 529431

Out of hours please contact **NHS111** by dialling 111

Exercise rehabilitation sheet

Theraband exercises

You have been given a piece of elastic band (Theraband)

1. Sit with your foot at a 90° angle to your leg
2. Place the centre of the theraband under your big toe (that has been operated on) and keep hold of the two ends
3. Pull the band a little tighter so that it starts to pull your toe towards you
4. Keeping the band taught, push your toe away from you against the band
5. Hold for a count of five seconds then relax
6. Repeat this 10 times, Complete this 5 times a day.

Keeping movement in your toe

1. Stand up; spread your bodyweight evenly over both feet
2. Transfer the weight to the foot that has not been operated on
3. Bend the toes of the foot that has been operated on, lifting your heel off the ground (as if on tip toe).
4. Hold this for a count of ten, then relax.
5. Repeat this 10 times, complete this 5 times a day.
6. As the exercise becomes easier, transfer more weight to the operated foot
7. As your foot becomes more comfortable and you are returning to normal walking increase the length of your stride as this will also improve the movement in the joint.

Scrunching

1. Lay a towel on the floor.
2. Stand with your foot on the towel.
3. Scrunch the towel up using your toes (especially the big toe).
4. Now straighten the towel up, again using your toes.

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on **03 44 811 8118**

Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: **0800 032 0202**

Text: 07815 500015

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

General Enquiries **03 44 811 8111**

www.northumbria.nhs.uk

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