

What to expect following an ankle replacement?

For 3 weeks after the operation, your ankle will be in a custom splint that will be made in the operating room. During this time, you will be non-weight bearing and using crutches or a scooter to help mobilize. It is important to keep the foot elevated during this time.

Clinic visit #1 (3 weeks post operatively): The splint comes off, we will remove staples and sutures, and you will then transition to a walking boot. Unless otherwise instructed, patients can start placing weight on their foot at this stage. Weight bearing should be gradual and within the limits of your comfort. You will be instructed to use a compression wrap to help expedite recovery.

Clinic visit #2 (6 weeks post operatively): You return to the clinic for a checkup. We will obtain standing follow-up x-rays to make sure everything is properly aligned. At this point, you have already been working with physiotherapy on range of motion exercises, and gradually increasing your weight bearing capacity. Going forward, once you are 100% comfortably weight-bearing in the walking boot, you may gradually start weaning off the walking boot and transition to a supportive shoe.

Clinic visit #3 (3 months post operatively): You return for an additional checkup & we obtain an additional set of x-rays. You continue physiotherapy to help strengthen the ankle. At this stage, most patients experience a substantial relief from their arthritic pain but may still experience swelling and aches around the ankle with prolonged activities. This will continue improving in the coming months.

Additional clinic visits take place at 6 months and 1 year post-operatively. We then continue to follow you on an annual basis.

Frequently asked questions:

How long before I can start walking? Most patients start putting weight on the foot after the 3 week post operative clinic visit. This is done in a walking boot. You gradually increase the amount of weight placed on the ankle. Most patients are fully weight bearing at the 6 week post operative visit.

How long is the recovery? Full recovery following an ankle replacement takes about one year.

When can I drive? If the surgery is on the left side, most patients are able to drive 3 weeks following the operation. If the surgery is on the right side, most patients start driving between 6 to 12 weeks after the operation.

What types of activities can I expect to participate in once fully recovered? Examples of recreational activities are walking, hiking, hockey, skiing, golfing, doubles tennis. Heavy loading activities such as jumping and running are discouraged.

What types of problems can happen with ankle replacements and are ankle replacements durable? Ankle replacements can have the following complications: infection (which may require repeat operation, revision, or removal of the implants), nerve or blood vessel injury, loosening or subsidence of the metal components, gradual wear of the plastic insert, and blood clots (DVT/PE).

Studies have documented that 90% of ankle replacements still function at 10 years. Most ankle replacements continue to function beyond that point. We are currently using 4th generation ankle replacements, and while long-term data is not available, these have shown very promising outcomes in the short term.