

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Subtalar joint fusion



What is a subtalar joint fusion?

This is an operation to fuse the joint under your ankle joint.

How is the operation done?

The joint surfaces are removed and the joint is then held together with two long screws. Sometimes a bone graft is taken from your lower leg just under your knee to encourage the joint to fuse together. Artificial bone graft may also be used in isolation or in combination with your own bone to enhance fusion. Artificial bone graft comes from a dead piece of human bone which is thoroughly tested. You will have either a general or spinal anaesthetic.

Please wash your feet thoroughly on the day you are admitted to hospital to reduce your risk of infection.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

- Pain killers (analgesia)
- Orthotics or special insoles
- Modified shoes
- Steroid injection.

These measures may only be temporary.

How long will I be in hospital?

You will be discharged when it is safe to do so. Some patients go home the same day but most others stay one or two nights.

Post-operative care

You will be using crutches to keep weight off your operated leg. Please ask for a leaflet on wheelchair hire if you think this will be helpful.

Please remember to move your knee regularly so that it doesn't become stiff. Keep your foot up when you are sat down and only walk when necessary for the first two weeks.

You need to wriggle your toes every hour and do some deep breathing exercises to reduce your risk of blood clots. It helps to drink plenty of clear fluids.

You may be given injections or tablets to reduce your risk of blood clots and you may be given a stocking to wear on your other leg.

You may find stairs difficult when you are non-weight bearing. You may need to arrange for some support at home.

When will I be seen in clinic?

You will be seen two weeks after your operation to check your wound/s and remove your stitches.

A further plaster cast will be applied, possibly a lightweight one. You may be seen by one of our nurse specialists for this appointment.

Six weeks after your operation you will be seen again with the plaster off and an x-ray on arrival. If all looks well at this stage you may be able to start putting weight through your foot in a boot.

A further x ray will be taken three months after surgery and hopefully you will be able to start walking again without any plaster or other support. The ankle may feel a bit stiff and there will still be some swelling present.

How long do I need off work?

Depending on the job you do, you may need up to three months off work after this operation. You may be able to go back to work earlier if you have a desk job and you are able to elevate your foot.

When can I drive?

Unless you have had left foot surgery and have an automatic car you will not be allowed to drive for three months, until your cast or boot is removed.

What are the risks and complications of this operation?

- Swelling
- Pain
- Infection
- Not healing, known as non-union (15-20%)
- Delayed healing
- DVT (deep vein thrombosis)
- Sometimes there is a need for further surgery to remove metal work or for non-union.

Smoking increases the risk of the bones NOT fusing by 16 times. If the joint does not fuse fully, you may need another operation with further bone grafting.

Please stop smoking before your surgery. If you need help with this you can be referred to Smoke Free Life for smoking cessation advice.

Please remember that it can take up to a year to feel the full benefit of this operation.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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