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Surgery

When is Foot Surgery Necessary?

Many foot problems do not respond to “conservative” management. Your podiatrist can determine when surgical intervention may be helpful. Often when pain or deformity persists, surgery may be appropriate to alleviate discomfort or to restore the function of your foot.

Types of Foot Surgery

Fusions: Fusions are usually performed to treat arthritic conditions of the foot and ankle. A fusion involves removing all cartilage from a joint and then joining two or more bones together so that they do not move. Fusions can be done with screws, plates or pins or a combination of these.

Tendon Surgery: Surgery on the tendons can be performed for acute injuries such as ruptures but is also commonly done to lengthen or shorten the tendon, depending on the problem. In some cases, tendons may be re-routed to improve foot and ankle function.

Metatarsal Surgery: Surgery on the lesser metatarsals is performed for a variety of reasons but is commonly done to redistribute the weight bearing on the ball of the foot. In some severe cases, such as rheumatoid arthritis, surgery may involve removing the metatarsal heads (the bones in the ball of the foot area).

Bunion Surgery: There are many different types of bunion surgery depending on the severity of the bunion and the joint involvement. Your podiatrist can explain the bunion procedure that is most appropriate for your bunion. Depending on the surgery necessary, the recovery time can be very different—particularly if you need to be on crutches after the surgery or in a cast.

Hammer Toe Surgery: Hammer toe surgery may involve removing a portion of the toe bone to realign the toe or could involve fusing the toe joint (see Fusions, above). In some cases, it may involve placing an implant in the toe to maintain realignment.

Neuroma Surgery: Neuroma surgery involves removing a benign enlargement of a nerve, usually between the metatarsal heads in the ball of the foot. This soft tissue surgery tends to have a shorter recovery time than bone procedures, but it leaves some residual numbness related to the removal of the piece of nerve tissue.

Heel Surgery: Based on the condition and the chronic nature of the disease, heel surgery can provide relief of pain and restore mobility in many cases. The type of procedure is based on examination and usually consists of plantar fascia release, with or without heel spur excision. There have been various modifications and surgical enhancements regarding surgery of the heel. Your podiatrist will determine which method is best suited for you.

Reconstructive Surgery: Reconstructive surgery of the foot and ankle consists of complex surgical repair(s) that may be necessary to regain function or stability, reduce pain, and/or prevent further deformity or disease.

Unfortunately, there are many conditions or diseases that range from trauma to congenital defects that necessitate surgery of the foot and/or ankle. Reconstructive surgery in many of these cases may require any of the following: tendon repair/transfer, fusion of bone, joint implantation, bone grafting, skin or soft tissue repair, tumor excision, amputation, and/or the osteotomy of bone (cutting of bones in a precise fashion). Bone screws, pins, wires, staples,

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and other fixation devices (both internal and external), and casts may be utilized to stabilize and repair bone in reconstructive procedures.

Preoperative Testing and Care

As with anyone preparing for any surgical procedure, those undergoing foot and ankle surgery require specific tests or examinations before surgery to improve a successful surgical outcome. Prior to surgery, the podiatrist will review your medical history and medical conditions. Specific diseases, illnesses, allergies, and current medications need to be evaluated. Other tests that help evaluate your health status may be ordered by your podiatrist, such as blood studies, urinalysis, EKG, X-rays, a blood flow study (to better evaluate the circulatory status of the foot and legs), and a biomechanical examination. A consultation with another medical specialist may be advised by a podiatrist, depending on your test results or a specific medical condition.

Postoperative Care

The type of foot surgery performed determines the length and kind of aftercare required to assure that your recovery from surgery is rapid and uneventful. The basics of all postoperative care involve to some degree each of the following: rest, ice, compression, and elevation. Bandages, splints, surgical shoes, casts, crutches, or canes may be necessary to improve and ensure a safe recovery after foot surgery. Your podiatric surgeon will also determine if and when you can bear weight on your foot after the operation. A satisfactory recovery can be hastened by carefully following instructions from your podiatrist.