

## **Patient Guide to Reconstructive Foot or Ankle Surgery**

This information is given to you in preparation for a major foot and/or ankle reconstructive surgery. This surgery may involve fixation of a fracture, correction of a postural deformity such as a severe flat foot, correction of a bunion, fusion of a joint in your foot or ankle, etc. We have found that there are a lot of common concerns and questions surrounding this type of surgery. The outcome of your foot or ankle surgery is greatly improved when you, your doctor and the physical therapist work together as a team. Knowing what to expect prior to surgery, during your short stay in the hospital and during the rehabilitation phase following the surgery will facilitate this process and decrease any anxiety you may feel regarding your surgery.

The material here will be reviewed with you during your visit. This handout will serve as a reminder as to what you can expect and the sequence of events as you progress through your recovery period.

- Following the surgery, you will NOT be weight bearing on the operated foot for 6-8 weeks. This means that you have to carry all your weight on the opposite side and use crutches, a walker or scooter to ambulate. You should practice getting around using these devices in preparation for your surgery. If you have a hard time with this, we will initiate a short course of physical therapy to get your upper extremities and the opposite lower extremity in shape. The time to learn this is not the day after your surgery!
- To be sure that you will not have any medical problems during your post-operative period, you need to be surgically cleared by your primary doctor. This involves getting certain laboratory studies such as blood work, EKG and perhaps a cardiac echo. If you have a cardiac condition and have been evaluated in the recent past, please provide us with a copy of that information as well.
- You may have to stop certain medications prior to your surgery. This information will be given to you on a separate sheet.
- Typically, a hospital nurse will contact you the day prior to your surgery to confirm the time of your arrival.
- You will be admitted to the hospital following your surgery. Most patients stay for 1 or 2 days. The criteria for discharge from the hospital is that your pain is managed on oral pain medication, you can tolerate a small diet, you are safe ambulating with your crutches, walker or scooter and you can urinate without difficulty.
- Typically you will have a bulky splint on your leg when you come out of surgery. This includes a thick cotton wrap with multiple layers of plaster and an ace wrap to stabilize your foot and ankle. This will be in place until your first post-operative visit. The dressing on your incisions will be kept sterile in this fashion. Keep the splint clean and dry. You can cover the splint to shower.
- Your first post-operative visit will be scheduled with both Dr. Ghalambor and a physical therapist. This is typically between 2 to 3 weeks following your surgery. Please write down all your questions prior to your visit. This is a relatively short visit with specific goals:
  - Your splint and all your stitches will be removed.
  - X-rays will be obtained to evaluate the hardware in your foot/ankle.

- Steri-strips (small tapes) will be applied across the incisions and the foot/ankle will be re-wrapped and placed in a CAM-Walker Boot. If you have a boot, be sure to bring it with you. The replacement cost of a boot is \$95.
  - You can now shower and let water run over your incisions. Place a chair in the shower, sit and remove your boot and dressing, use gentle soap and water to clean your foot, thoroughly dry the foot, cover with sterile gauze and ace wrap and place it back in the boot. Do not soak your foot in water.
  - The physical therapist will answer any questions you may have regarding your weight-bearing status, use of assistive devices for ambulation, and your rehabilitation.
  - Dr. Ghalambor will review your x-rays with you and answer any other questions you may have.
- Your second visit is typically at 6-8 weeks following your surgery. X-rays will be taken again to confirm the structural integrity of your reconstruction. You will most likely begin weight bearing today! There is a specific protocol to advance you from non-weight bearing to full weight bearing. This process will take approximately 2 weeks and will be reviewed with you in detail by the physical therapist. Dr. Ghalambor will also see you to answer any questions you may have. The highlights of the weight bearing protocol are as follows:
    - You will start weight bearing in the boot by placing only 25-50 lbs on your operated foot.
    - You will advance the weight by 25 lbs every 2-3 days until you reach your total body weight.
    - Once you are totally comfortable ambulating without any assistive devices in the boot, you can then transition to a regular shoe.
- Your third visit is 4 weeks after the last visit (approximately 10 weeks after your surgery). By now you should be fully weight bearing in a regular shoe. You will have your third set of X-rays, meet with the physical therapist to address any rehabilitation issues and meet with Dr. Ghalambor to answer any other questions.
- Your 4<sup>th</sup> visit is typically 6 weeks later. You will have your final set of X-rays at this time. The need for all future visits is very much dependent on the type of surgery you had and will be determined based on your progress to date.