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Subtalar Joint Arthrodesis

INTRODUCTION

The subtalar joint is the joint underneath the ankle that is responsible for approximately 80% of the side to side motion of the foot. It is made up of the heel bone (calcaneus) and the bone comprising the bottom surface of the ankle (talus). At times it becomes arthritic resulting in pain, swelling and loss of function, and this is most commonly seen after a calcaneal fracture which is gone onto post-traumatic arthritis. Fusing the subtalar joint is an effective way of decreasing pain and improving the function of the foot. Fusion of a joint means surgically stabilising and connecting the two bones on either side of the joint together. After a subtalar fusion most patients are able to walk comfortably, without a limp, and have considerably less pain.

THE PROCEDURE

There are a number of steps to subtalar fusion surgery.

These include:

1. General anaesthetic and ankle nerve block, Intravenous antibiotics
2. 4cm incision on the outside of the foot
3. Removal of remaining cartilage from subtalar joint
4. Insertion of bone graft and other cells to stimulate fusion
5. Fixation with titanium screws
6. Check X-rays
7. Closure of wound
8. Plaster backslab

RISKS & COMPLICATIONS

Every surgical procedure carries some risk. These risks are largely uncommon and many are rare.

They include:

Wound infection

Anaesthetic complications

Drug allergy

Sensory nerve injury

Deep venous thrombosis/pulmonary embolism

Failure of fusion (10%)

POST OPERATIVE PROTOCOL

You will stay two nights in hospital for post-operative pain relief, observation, and physiotherapy assessment

You will need to keep the foot elevated as much as possible

sutures are removed at roughly 2 weeks

Non-weight-bearing for the first 6 weeks in a cast

anticoagulation during this time

Weight-bearing commences in a boot from week 6 to 12

Boot discontinued after 12 weeks

Return to most activities within 4 to 6 months

Full recovery up to 12 months

PROBLEMS AND CONCERNS

If you have any queries or concerns, contact Dr. Ling's rooms on 9650 4782 between business hours. After hours or on weekends, if your matter is urgent, please present to the Emergency Department at Prince of Wales Hospital if you are an adult, or Sydney Children's Hospital if the patient is your child, and you will be seen by the Orthopaedic Registrar on call, who will contact Dr Ling directly