OS14lite Ankle Arthrodesis

This document will give you information about ankle arthrodesis. If you have any questions, you should ask your GP or other relevant health professional.

What is arthritis?

Arthritis is a group of conditions that cause damage to one or more joints.
The most common type of arthritis is osteoarthritis, where there is gradual wear and tear of a joint. In some cases this is the result of an injury. Some other types of arthritis are associated with inflammation of the joints.
Arthritis eventually wears away the normal cartilage covering the surface of the joint and the bone underneath becomes damaged. This causes joint pain and stiffness.

What are the benefits of surgery?

If your ankle arthrodesis is successful, you should have less pain and be able to walk more easily.

Are there any alternatives to ankle arthrodesis?

Simple painkillers such as paracetamol and anti-inflammatory painkillers such as ibuprofen can help control the pain of arthritis. Supplements to your diet may also help relieve your symptoms. You should check with your doctor before you take supplements.
Using a walking stick can make walking easier. A plastic splint or a stiff ankle boot with a cushioned heel is sometimes helpful.
A steroid injection into your ankle joint can sometimes reduce pain and stiffness.
A keyhole operation (arthroscopy) to clean out the ankle joint can give some relief for six to twelve months.
All of these measures become less effective if your arthritis gets worse.

Some people with ankle arthritis can have an ankle replacement.

What does the operation involve?

A variety of anaesthetic techniques are possible. The operation usually takes between an hour and an hour and a half.
Sometimes your surgeon can use keyhole surgery, but other times they will need to make one or more larger cuts in the skin.
Your surgeon will remove the damaged joint surfaces. They will then fix the bones together with screws (see figure 1). With time, the bones will join together so that the ankle does not move at all.

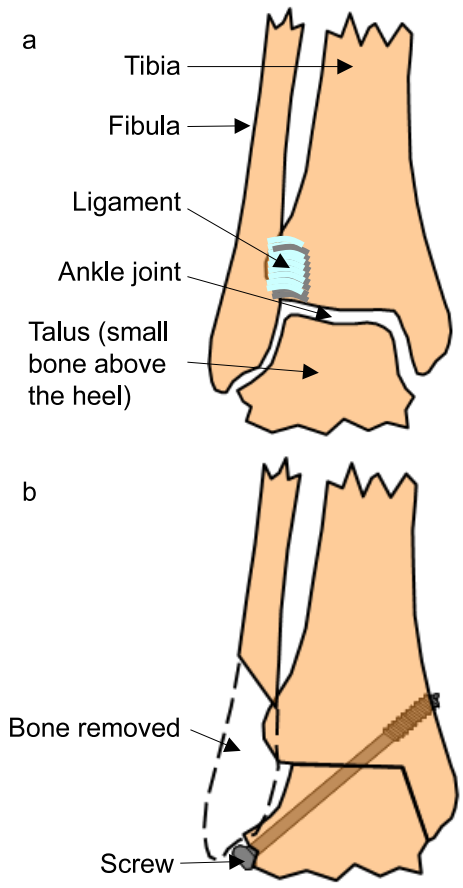

Figure 1

a A normal ankle

b An ankle arthrodesis

At the end of the operation, your surgeon will put your leg in a plaster cast.

What complications can happen?

1 General complications of any operation

- Pain
- Bleeding
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Unsightly scarring
- Blood clots
- Difficulty passing urine

2 Specific complications of this operation

- Damage to nerves
- Infection in the ankle
- Failure of the arthrodesis
- Severe pain, stiffness and loss of use of the foot and ankle

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home after one to three days.
Most people need to have the plaster cast for about twelve weeks. You will need to use crutches or sticks until it is removed.
Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, you should ask a member of the healthcare team or your GP for advice.
Most people make a good recovery, have less pain, and can move about better.

Summary

If you have severe arthritis in your ankle, an ankle arthrodesis should reduce your pain and allow you to do more of your normal activities.

Further information

- NHS smoking helpline on 0800 022 4 332 and at www.smokefree.nhs.uk
- www.eatwell.gov.uk – for advice on maintaining a healthy weight
- www.eidoactive.co.uk – for information on how exercise can help you
- www.aboutmyhealth.org – for support and information you can trust
- American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons at www.aaos.org
- www.thefootandankleclinic.com
- www.medicalmultimediagroup.com
- Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome Association at www.rsds.org
- NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 (0845 606 46 47 – textphone)

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