



Total Ankle Replacement Offers Improved Outcomes for Arthritis Sufferers

By David B. Kay, MD

Ankle arthritis affects millions of Americans. While ankle fusion has long been the standard for treating this condition, more patients are opting for ankle replacement.

Total ankle replacement surgery is used to treat the pain and immobility of severe, end-stage arthritis that has not responded to non-surgical treatments. The goal of this surgery is to eliminate pain and increase the mobility of the ankle joint.

Before proceeding with surgery, your doctor will first need to evaluate your ankle to determine proper diagnosis and treatment. An accurate diagnosis includes a detailed medical history and physical examination. Imaging tests, such as x-rays, Doppler and MRI, may also be conducted. Depending on individual needs, a CT scan may also be necessary to customize guides.

Like other joint replacements, this procedure involves replacing the damaged joint with a new one made of metal and plastic. During the surgery, these components are attached to the talus and tibia bones and secured with screws to ensure a tight fit of the new prosthesis. Afterwards, most patients remain in the hospital for a few days.

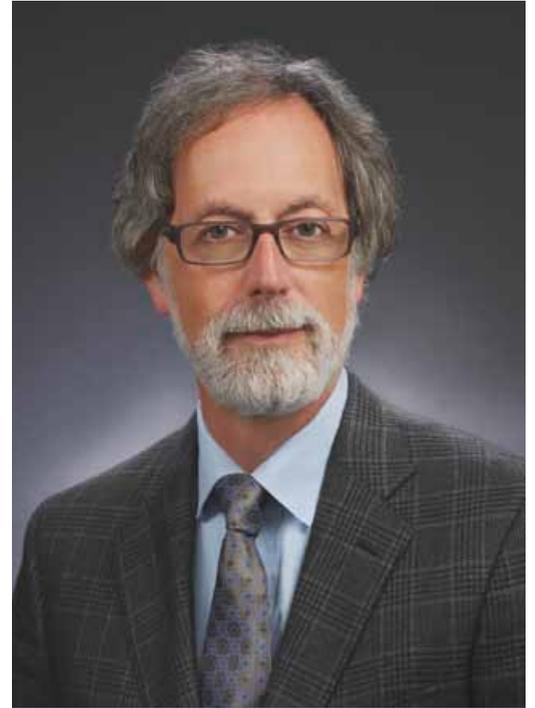
Recovery time is quicker than with fusion. Physical therapy usually begins soon after surgery and continues for about three months to help regain the full range of motion.

Typically, patients can move their ankle within two weeks, progressing to full weight-bearing exercises after six weeks. Because ankle replacement relies upon ingrowth of the bone into the joint, total recovery usually takes up to six months.

While no surgery is without risk, the majority of patients suffer no complications following ankle joint replacement; however, complications can occur. These may include infection, fracture of the tibia or fibula bone, dislocation of the ankle, damage to nerves or blood vessels, blood clots, loosening of artificial components, failure to relieve pain, scar tissue build-up requiring revision surgery, and instability, stiffness, or weakness of the new ankle joint.

Ankle joint replacement surgery is not appropriate in all cases of ankle arthritis. In some cases, ankle fusion may be a better option. It's always important to thoroughly discuss any concerns you have with your doctor prior to surgery. Your surgeon will determine the best options for you based on your particular situation.

As with any surgery, success depends on your age, activity level and other factors. To find out if ankle replacement is right for you, contact the Crystal Clinic Orthopaedic Center for a personal consultation with one of our foot and ankle specialists.



Dr. Kay is a board-certified, fellowship-trained orthopaedic surgeon, who specializes in foot and ankle conditions. He is a graduate of the Medical College of Ohio (Toledo). He served his residency at Akron General Medical Center and his fellowship in foot and ankle reconstruction at Wagner Institute at the University of Southern California. He is also a professor of orthopaedic surgery at Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED). Dr. Kay is affiliated with a number of professional orthopaedics organizations and has held several teaching appointments. Dr. Kay has been a physician since 1980 and is a member of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons.