

Instructions After Foot and Ankle Surgery

What are my instructions after surgery?

Keep your dressings dry

Bleeding through the dressings is common. This usually happens during the first 1-2 hours after surgery. The actual bleeding will have stopped by the time you see the drainage through your dressings.

- We will change your dressings for you at your follow-up appointment after surgery! **Do not change your own dressing unless we specifically tell you to do so.**
- Keep your dressings dry at all times. Do not shower, bathe, or wet your dressing in any way. If you'd like, you can buy a "cast bag" or use a garbage bag to cover your dressing while you shower.

Elevate your foot or ankle

- It is important to elevate your foot or ankle (meaning that you should keep it raised or propped up) for 14-16 days. Elevate your foot or ankle above your heart, or at least at waist level. The more you elevate your foot and ankle, the less pain you will have. You can take breaks from elevating for 10 minutes or less at a time.
- Float your heel when you elevate your foot, so that the heel is not in direct contact with anything. This will help you avoid developing a pressure sore on the back of your heel. See the picture below for details.

Heel FLOATING = Correct



Heel DOWN = Incorrect



- After 14-16 days of elevation, you may slowly become more active and get up more. Pay attention to how your foot or ankle is feeling so you know when to lie down and elevate it again.

Avoid putting weight on your foot or ankle

Do not put any weight on your foot or ankle for 2-6 weeks. This means your foot may not touch the ground when you stand or walk.

Take medication to prevent blood clots

- ☐ Take one 81 mg enteric-coated aspirin pill twice daily. Start the first day after your surgery, and continue taking this medication until you are walking out of a cast or boot. This will help you decrease the risk of developing a blood clot (deep venous thrombosis, or DVT) in your leg.
- ☐ Other medication: _____. Start taking this the first day after surgery unless your provider tells you otherwise.

How will I manage my pain?

You can expect to have some level of pain after surgery. This is normal and part of the healing process. Everyone feels pain differently. Our goal is to help make your pain more tolerable.

Over-the-counter (non-prescription) pain medications

You can manage your pain with over-the-counter pain medications. These may include:

☐ **Extra Strength Tylenol® (acetaminophen)**

- Take 1000 mg (two 500 mg pills) every 8 hours.
- Continue to take acetaminophen while you have pain.
- Remember that some opioid (narcotic) medications have acetaminophen in them. If you are also taking opioid medications, consider this when deciding how much acetaminophen to take.
- Do not take more than 3000 mg of acetaminophen in 24 hours.

☐ **Optional: Motrin® (ibuprofen)**

- Take up to 600 mg every 6-8 hours. However, do not take ibuprofen if we have specifically told you not to.
- Alternate taking ibuprofen with taking acetaminophen. This means that you are taking both medications at different times on a set schedule. An example table of how you'd alternate this pain medications is included below.
- Do not take more than 3200 mg of ibuprofen in 24 hours.
- Talk with your primary care doctor before taking ibuprofen if you are on blood thinners, or if you have a history of heart disease, severe kidney disease, bariatric surgery, or stomach ulcers.

Example timetable of alternating pain medications:

Time	Medication dose
8:00 AM	1000 mg Tylenol® (acetaminophen)
12:00 PM (noon)	600 mg Motrin® (ibuprofen)
4:00 PM	1000 mg Tylenol® (acetaminophen)
8:00 PM	600 mg Motrin® (ibuprofen)
12:00 AM (midnight)	1000 mg Tylenol® (acetaminophen)

Opioid pain medication

You will receive a prescription for a small amount of one of the following opioid pain medications:

- ☐ **Oxycodone** (5 mg tablets)
- ☐ **Hydrocodone-acetaminophen** (Norco® 5-325 mg tablets)
 - Be aware that this medication contains acetaminophen.
- ☐ **Tramadol** (50 mg tablets)

Opioids are very strong pain relief medications that you should only take as prescribed. If your pain is not tolerable on the medication schedule we prescribed you, please call us.

- You may use the opioid medication for severe pain in the **first 24 hours after surgery**. After that, **only** take it if absolutely needed.
- We recommend that you stop taking opioids within 2 weeks after your surgery.

Nerve blocks

Depending on your specific surgery, our anesthesia team may have offered you a nerve block as another way to help control your pain after surgery. This would be in addition to the pain medication pills the surgery team will prescribe. A **nerve block** is an injection of medication given to you before surgery that numbs the nerves that send pain signals to your brain. Sometimes

we may also place a **catheter** (a thin, flexible tube) with your nerve block that will continue to give you numbing medication for a longer period of time.

If you received a nerve block without a catheter:

- Your pain relief may last anywhere between 4-24 hours. This means you may have numbness, tingling, or not be able to move your foot for that amount of time.
- You will have pain as the nerve block begins to wear off, so you should start taking your pain medications before the block wears off. Take your first dose of prescribed pain medications 2-4 hours after getting home. Take them until the nerve block wears off, then only take pain medications as needed.

If you received a nerve block with a catheter:

- The Acute Pain Service team will typically call to check in on you.
- Take your prescribed opioid pain medication and acetaminophen on a schedule for the first 24 hours. After that, only take the opioid medication as needed if you have severe pain. Continue taking acetaminophen while you have pain.
- If you have questions about the catheter, call (734) 936-4000 and ask for the Acute Pain Service doctor on call.

What other medications might I take after surgery?

- If you have nausea or vomiting from the opioid medications, or itching from the dressings, our surgery team may prescribe you a medication called hydroxyzine. You may take one 25 mg hydroxyzine pill every 6 hours as needed. If you know you are sensitive to opioids, you may take 1 tablet 30 minutes before you take any opioid pain medication.
- For your bone health, we recommend taking the following supplements during your recovery period:

- Vitamin C (500 mg daily)
- Vitamin D3 (5000 international units daily)
- Calcium (1000 mg daily)
- If you are constipated, take a stool softener from a pharmacy (like Peri-Colace®, Colace®, Senekot®, or MiraLAX®), and make sure to drink fluids and stay hydrated. If you tend to get constipation, you may take it as prevention. Stop taking the stool softener after you have regular bowel movements, or if you're having diarrhea.

When should I call for help?

Contact the office if you have any of the symptoms below:

- Severe swelling or pain in your leg or calf (this could be a sign of a deep vein thrombosis, or a clot in your leg)
- Heavy bleeding that soaks through your dressing and increases in size
- You have a splint as part of your dressing that is rubbing on your skin
- Blue or white toes
 - This is a sign of a lack of blood flow to the foot. Try elevating your toes to see if the color improves. If not, call us.
- Fever greater than 101.5 °F
 - It's very common to have a small fever the first few days after surgery, and it's unlikely that it means you have an infection. Taking a few deep breaths every hour until you are more mobile may help prevent or reduce your fever.
- Severe pain (after the first night of surgery) that does not improve with pain medication

What is the contact information?

If you have any of the problems above or any other urgent concerns, please contact us. If you are contacting us about a medication refill, please be aware that it will take up to 24 hours for our office to refill the prescription. If you

have non-urgent questions, please write them down and bring them to your next appointment.

- On Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM – 4:30 PM, call our office at (734) 936-5780.
- Do not call the office after hours, as no one will be available to answer your call. If you have urgent concerns after 4:30 PM or on weekends or holidays that cannot wait until our office is open, call the paging operator at (734) 936-6267 and ask them to page the orthopedic resident on call.
- If you are unable to reach anyone through the phone numbers above, or if you think it's a medical emergency, please call 911 and/or go to the nearest emergency department.

What follow-up appointments will I have after surgery?

You will usually have a follow-up appointment 1-2 weeks after surgery, and then another appointment 6 weeks after surgery. These visits are required, as they are an important part of the recovery process. Please plan ahead to make sure you have transportation for your follow-up appointments.

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