Total Ankle Replacement (TAR)

What is an ankle replacement?
Osteoarthritis occurs when the cartilage lining the ankle joint has worn down which causes severe pain. An ankle replacement involves removing the painful arthritic ankle joint and replacing it with a manufactured implant (prosthesis).

Why is it performed?
The primary reason for undergoing a TAR is for pain relief. Good relief of pain can be expected and some (but not all) movement of the joint is preserved.

However, TAR is not successful when there is more than a minor deformity of the ankle. It is also not possible when there has been previous infection, neuromuscular disease or skin problems. Approximately 1 in 5 ankle replacements wear out or loosen before 10 years. When this happens, the TAR usually cannot be revised (unlike hip and knee replacements) and has to be converted to a fusion.

What does the operation involve?
Prior to the operation you will be seen in the Pre-assessment clinic or receive a phone call assessment. This is to ensure that you are fit to have surgery.

You will stay in hospital for 1 or 2 days. The operation is usually performed under a general anaesthetic, with a nerve block for pain relief. An incision is made over the front of the ankle through which all the surgery is performed. Your risk of developing a deep vein thrombosis will be assessed and prophylactic treatment will be given as required.

What about pain?
Whilst you are in hospital you will be monitored and the medical staff will give you pain relief as required and prescribed. You will be given pain relief medication to take home. Advice regarding this will be given by the nursing staff before you leave hospital.

How long does recovery take?
A below knee temporary cast will be applied following the operation.
You will be encouraged to walk with the help of physiotherapists as soon as possible after surgery, but there may be an initial period of non-weight bearing with the aid of crutches.

You will be seen in clinic approximately 10 to 14 days following your surgery. Your wound will be checked and any stitches removed as required. A walker boot or full plaster will be applied and you may be allowed to increase the amount of weight bearing. The walker boot or plaster is usually worn for approximately 6 weeks following surgery.
Swelling is quite common after foot and ankle surgery and this is best managed by elevating the foot at regular intervals. You are advised to elevate the operated foot/ankle on a pillow every night and during the day on three separate occasions, e.g., 11am, 3pm and 6pm, for about one hour each time. These instructions should be followed for at least 2-3 weeks.

**When can I return to work and driving?**

Driving an automatic car is usually possible after 2-3 weeks with a left TAR, otherwise driving is not permitted for at least 6-8 weeks. You may return to an office-type job at 2-3 weeks, but if prolonged standing is required 2-3 months leave may be required. You are advised not to fly after surgery for at least 6 weeks (short haul) and 12 weeks (long haul).

**What are the possible complications?**

- Infection (in the wound or the joint replacement itself).
- Wound healing problems (if serious may require plastic surgery).
- Excessive bleeding / blood vessel damage.
- Injury to a nerve.
- Deep vein thrombosis (clot in a vein).
- Pulmonary embolus (clot in the lungs).
- Stiffness (inadequate range of movement).
- Residual pain
- Collapse / deformity of the foot.
- Loosening or wear requiring revision surgery.

The above complications are rare but can occur.

**Useful contact numbers**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post op team</td>
<td>0300 614 7207</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physio office</td>
<td>0300 614 7235</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ward 4 HW</td>
<td>0300 614 7642</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orthopaedic pre assessment</td>
<td>0300 614 7147</td>
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For a translation of this leaflet or a copy in another format, please call the Trust switchboard on 0300 6145000 and ask for the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) office at Frimley Park or Wexham Park (for Wexham Park and Heatherwood).

Title of Leaflet  Total ankle replacement (TAR)

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