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Ankle Surgery for Arthritis

Discover effective treatments for ankle arthritis, from physical therapy to advanced ankle surgery. Learn how Summit Orthopaedics in Idaho Falls helps restore mobility and reduce pain.

[Ankle](#)

It's unclear exactly how many people have ankle arthritis, a condition caused by the breakdown of cartilage in the ankle joint. However, experts suspect about **1 to 12%** of the population suffers from this condition. The severity of ankle arthritis varies from mild discomfort to extreme pain and can be caused by autoimmune arthritic conditions or trauma.

Ankle arthritis can be challenging to live with, but [treatment options](#) are available. Physical therapy and lifestyle modifications are recommended for mild cases. For more severe cases, ankle surgery has proven highly effective at restoring functionality to the ankle area.

It's important to take the time to determine which treatment option is right for you. If you're considering surgery, our team at [Summit Orthopaedics](#) can help you determine whether that is the best route for you.

Causes and Symptoms of Ankle Arthritis

Ankle arthritis can affect anyone, but it's more common in older individuals. You usually get it as a result of general wear and tear. Over time, the cartilage inside the joint begins to wear down, resulting in pain and stiffness. People who have rheumatic disease are also more likely to have ankle arthritis.

It's also possible to get ankle arthritis as a result of trauma. For example, it may develop after an intense ankle injury. Though the cause is different, the result—the joint's cartilage wearing away—is the same.

Ankle arthritis results in stiff, painful ankles with a limited range of motion. As such, people with the condition often find it more challenging to maintain an active lifestyle.

While there's no "cure" for ankle arthritis, many treatment solutions are available. Detecting ankle arthritis and taking action as soon as possible increases the possibility of the individual living a full life.

Non-Surgical Treatment Options

Ankle surgery isn't appropriate for everyone. For milder cases of ankle arthritis, at least at first, non-surgical approaches are usually recommended. An orthopedic surgeon can assess your candidacy for ankle surgery.

Milder cases can be managed via medication, physical therapy, and lifestyle modifications. Maintaining a healthy weight and engaging in low-impact activities, such as cycling and swimming, have been shown to help with joint mobility.

Non-surgical treatments can reduce pain and slow down deterioration of the ankle joint, but they can't reverse the damage that's already occurred. Surgical intervention may be more appropriate if your ankle pain is impacting your day-to-day life.

Ankle Surgery Options for Arthritis

There are two primary ankle arthritis surgery options available: ankle fusion and ankle replacement.

Ankle fusion uses metal screws to join bones together around the affected joint. Over time, they become a single bone, removing the friction and subsequent pain.

Ankle replacement is recommended for more severe cases where the joint has already suffered significant damage. This surgical process involves removing the joint entirely and replacing it with metal or plastic parts.

If ankle pain inhibits your daily life and non-surgical solutions are ineffective, your orthopedic surgeon may recommend ankle surgery. This treatment

nerve damage, and bone misalignment are a few potential side effects.

Preparing for Ankle Surgery

Your orthopedic surgeon will work closely with you throughout the surgical process. During the initial consultation, the surgeon will assess your candidacy and explain the process in detail.

Standard procedures before surgery include various medical tests (X-rays, blood work, EKGs) and an analysis of your medical history. Your surgeon will ask if you're on any medications and check if they may impact the surgical process.

While ankle surgery is safe, it's important to psychologically prepare yourself. Reading up on what the process involves, engaging in relaxation activities (meditation or yoga), and seeking support from loved ones are all recommended.

What to Expect During Ankle Surgery

Your orthopedic surgeon will explain the surgical process in precise detail. As mentioned above, there are two main types of ankle surgery: joint fusion and total joint replacement. How long the surgery takes will depend on which type of surgery you're getting. In general, ankle surgeries typically last between two to three hours.

You'll be placed under anesthesia during surgery, either general anesthesia or local anesthesia. For general anesthesia, you'll be asleep during the surgery, and you will have little to no memory of it. If your surgeon administers local anesthesia, you'll be awake but unable to feel the ankle area.

It's highly unlikely that anything will go wrong during the surgery, but there are some complications to be aware of. Infections, nerve damage, and anesthesia-related complications have all been reported.

Ankle Surgery Recovery and Rehab

You'll likely need to stay in the hospital for a night or two following your ankle surgery. Doctors will prescribe pain management medication if required and provide you with any necessary equipment (crutches or a boot, for example).

Your medical team will also advise you on steps to aid your recovery. These measures will likely include rehabilitation exercises and physical therapy at home or with a trained professional.

How long it takes to recover from the surgery and return to normal activities depends on a number of factors, including the type of surgery you've received and your body's natural rate of recovery. Most people can return to basic activities between two to four months, but it may take up to a year to fully recover.

Long-Term Outlook After Ankle Surgery

Both ankle replacement surgery and ankle fusion surgery have high success rates. Patients are encouraged to make lifestyle adjustments to maximize the results of their surgery. Maintaining a healthy weight, avoiding high-impact activities, and avoiding unhealthy habits (like smoking or drinking alcohol) tend to help.

Contact Summit Orthopedics

Plenty of treatment options are available for adults with ankle arthritis, including non-surgical and surgical interventions. Knowing the risks and benefits of surgery can help you make an informed decision about whether or not it's right for you.

To learn more about ankle surgery for arthritis in Idaho Falls, [contact Summit Orthopaedics](#) today and schedule a consultation.

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