

RECONSTRUCTION SURGERY FOR THE UNSTABLE ANKLE

This surgery is recommended for patients who experience recurrent ankle sprains despite a course of physiotherapy treatment. The aim of surgery is to prevent the development of ankle arthritis and to reduce the risk of developing ankle joint damage as each episode of ankle sprain may lead to ankle joint injury.

Patients with ankle joint problems such as ankle joint surface damage (chondral or osteochondral lesions), synovitis, bony impingement spurs and loose bodies in association with ankle lateral ligament instability may also require an ankle arthroscopy performed at the same time as the lateral ligament reconstruction.

The surgery may be performed as a day surgery procedure. The patient may weight bear as tolerated after the operation. Crutches are recommended for a few days after the operation until the patient is comfortable walking.

The ankle lateral ligament reconstruction surgery is performed through a small 2cm incision over the tip of the fibula. The ligaments are shortened and reinserted into the fibula with the aid of 2 small bony anchors. The anchors stay in the tip of the fibula permanently unless it causes irritation. Local anaesthetic is injected around the incision site. This usually provides good pain relief for up to 6 hours after the operation. There is some increase in pain after the local anaesthetic wears off at which time tablets by mouth will usually provide sufficient pain relief.

At the end of surgery, a bulky dressing is applied. An ankle stirrup brace would also be applied. The bulky dressing should remain in place for at least 7 days. During this time the dressing should be kept dry. Formal physiotherapy exercises commence 2 weeks after the operation. A physiotherapy protocol is provided for the patient's physiotherapist. Dr Lam reviews patients 2 weeks after the surgery. The ankle stirrup brace needs to be worn whenever walking and sleeping but may be taken off to exercise when the patient is non-weight bearing.

The timing of returning to work and sport will depend on the type and severity of any associated ankle joint problem that is being treated and the type of work and sport involved. Dr Lam is able to provide an indication of the expected return to work and sport prior to surgery.