

## **Ankle Fracture - Operative Fixation Post-Operative Weight Bearing Progression**

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### **POST-OPERATIVE WEIGHT BEARING PROGRESSION**

- A splint is typically applied to the leg after surgery and left in place for 2 weeks
- Depending on the specifics of the fracture, at your 2-week post op visit you may be placed into a short leg cast or a removable boot
- If you were placed in a cast, your skin will often become scaly underneath the cast. This is normal and will improve over time as you begin to bathe normally
- Continue to monitor for any increasing redness or drainage about the surgical incision
- In most cases, weight-bearing will begin at 4-6 weeks after surgery
- When cleared by Dr. Heikes to begin bearing weight, the following progression is recommended to make the transition easier
- Crutches or a walker will need to be used during the progression
- If you go through a step with no significant increase in discomfort or swelling, you may progress to the next step
- Some increase in soreness and swelling is expected as you begin to place more demand on the leg
- If you are having significant discomfort, you should stay on the same step or back up one step until the pain and/or swelling improve. Then resume the progression
- Elevation and icing continue to be important in controlling soreness and swelling throughout this progression

### **WEIGHT-BEARING PROGRESSION – PHASE I**

- All weight-bearing in Phase I is done in the CAM boot
- You may sleep with the boot off or on- your choice. Most people prefer to sleep with the boot on for a short time
- Each step will take differing amounts of time for each patient. Usually around 2-4 days will be needed at each step
- For the first few days, put 25% of your body weight down on the injured leg
  - For example, if you weight 200 pounds, using a scale put 50 pounds of weight down on the injured leg in order to get a feel for the appropriate amount of weight
- If you are able to tolerate 25% well, progress to 50% of your bodyweight
- If you are able to tolerate 50% well, progress to 75% of your bodyweight
- If you are able to tolerate 75% well, progress to 100% of your body weight while still using crutches
- If you are able to tolerate 100% with crutches well, progress to using 1 crutch under the opposite arm

- If you are able to tolerate 100% with 1 crutch well, progress to 100% with no crutches

## WEIGHT-BEARING PROGRESSION – PHASE II

- At a follow-up appointment with Dr. Heikes, x-rays will be checked and if everything is progressing as expected, you may proceed to Phase II
- Begin by coming out of the CAM boot and into a comfortable, supportive shoe (such as a tennis shoe) on the injured limb.
- For the first few days, spend only a couple of hours out of the boot, then put the CAM boot back on for the rest of the day
- Make sure to have the CAM boot available to you in case your ankle begins to get sore
  - For example, make sure to take the CAM boot with you if you go to work or on a trip
- After a few days, increase the time spent out of the boot to around 4 hours
- Gradually increase the time of each day you spend out of the boot until you are not using the CAM boot at all
- Keep in mind, you may have some swelling and soreness during this phase as your activity increases. Ice and elevation can still be helpful
- Many patients notice a limp after ankle fracture surgery. This is common, and is usually due to weakness of the calf muscle from being immobilized for several weeks. This will improve over time as the strength of your calf improves

## OTHER COMMON CONCERNS AFTER ANKLE FRACTURE SURGERY

- Driving
  - Return to driving depends on which ankle is injured
  - Studies have been done regarding when it is safe to return to driving after ankle fracture surgery. They have shown that braking time returns to normal at about 9 weeks after surgery on average.
- Swelling
  - It is very common to have swelling intermittently after ankle fracture surgery. This may persist for several months. Elevation and icing can be helpful
- Return to sports/recreational activity
  - This depends on the activity and the patient, but usually patients can return to most activities around 3-4 months after surgery
- Sensitivity of skin around the foot/ankle
  - Some sensitivity of the skin of the foot and ankle is very common after surgery and typically improves with time
- Physical Therapy
  - Physical therapy is not routinely prescribed after ankle fracture surgery, but may be recommended in some cases
- Other questions
  - As always, please contact Dr. Heikes's office if you have other questions or concerns