The Centers for Advanced Orthopaedics

The Orthopaedic Foot & Ankle Center

Ankle Arthroscopy

Ankle arthroscopy is a technique used to examine and treat problems within the ankle joint. These problems can include build-up of scar tissue, inflammation, and can be used to treat advanced fractures. Through the use of advanced micro cameras and micro instruments. The surgeon is able to examine the very small space that makes up the ankle joint and occasionally, the joint underneath the ankle or the toe joint.

The operation is performed with anesthesia. Often, only the leg is being operated on needs to be numbed. This is known as a regional anesthesia. Some patients may prefer to go to sleep and have a general anesthesia.

During surgery, the leg is placed into a device designed to pull the ankle so that the precise micro instruments can be entered into the ankle joint. This pulling pressure also helps to slow bleeding during surgery so the total amount of blood loss during surgery is less than a tablespoon.

Once the micro instruments and camera are introduced, a thorough investigation of the ankle is performed. The surgeon is also guided by x-rays and MRIs performed before to accurately identify and repair your injury.

The most common condition requiring ankle arthroscopy involves build-up of scar and inflammation around the ankle joint. This is known as an impingement lesion. Occasionally, bone spurs and abnormal bone prominences may be removed from the normal anatomy of the ankle joint. When abnormal objects are removed, it is known as an excision.

Excisions are different from repairs. Repairs involve identifying abnormal structures and returning them to normal. This may involve torn ligaments that undergo repair, or it may involve broken bone and cartilage fragments (osteochondral defects) that are replaced or drilled to promote scar cartilage. The recovery from excisions is different from the recovery of repairs.

Because excisions involve only the removal of abnormal processes, the body only needs to heal the minor injury created by the surgery. Repairs, however, require the recovery from surgery and the repaired structures such as cartilage, bone, or ligament to heal. As a rule, damaged structures within the ankle take 6 weeks to heal. If too much weight or force is applied to a healing structure, the structure may fail and the surgical results may be compromised.

Most ankle arthroscopy procedures are performed as an outpatient basis in the hospital or surgery center. After surgery, a large bulky dressing is applied. If a repair is performed, you may also have plaster splints to hold the foot and ankle in a specific position. You will be asked to remain off the leg and use crutches, walker, or a knee scooter. The healing ankle immediately after surgery is not strong enough to support your body weight. The large dressing is placed in the sterile environment of surgery as this is the cleanest and most antiseptic covering available. Because of this we try to keep this dressing up against the skin as long as possible. If there is slight drainage or spotting after surgery, we will try to reinforce the dressing as opposed to changing it.