

Ankle Instability (Ankle giving way)

What causes ankle instability?

Ankle instability is most commonly caused by ligament damage around the ankle. In some cases it is related to cartilage and bone damage/arthritis of the ankle joint.

Ligament damage results from twisting injuries to the ankle. This is commonly known as “Ankle Sprain”. Most ankle sprains resolve without long term problems. A small percentage of ankle sprains may give rise to ankle instability.

How is the diagnosis made?

Your clinician will ask a few questions (taking history) and do a clinical examination of the ankle. In most cases an X-ray of the ankle is also done. The best investigation to see ligaments and cartilage is MRI scan. An MRI scan is performed to confirm the diagnosis.

What is the treatment for ankle instability?

The first line of treatment for ankle instability is Physiotherapy. Physiotherapy helps a very high percentage of patients with ankle instability. Surgery is reserved for patients who do not respond to physiotherapy

What does the operation involve?

The operation would involve reconstruction of the damaged ankle ligament. In most cases the lateral ligament (outer aspect of ankle) of the ankle is damaged.

The operation is performed as a day case procedure. It is in most cases performed under general anaesthesia. Routinely key hole surgery of the ankle is performed prior to repairing the ligament. Skin cut is made on the outside of the ankle. The damaged ligament is exposed and reconstructed using bone anchors. You will be placed in a plaster splint following surgery.

What is the post-operative recovery?

You will be advised to not put any weight through the operated leg for 2 weeks. Blood thinning injections to prevent clots are routinely given for 2 weeks. At about 2 weeks, skin stitches and plaster splint are removed and your ankle will be placed in a boot. At this stage you will also be referred to physiotherapy. You will be allowed to weight bear as able in the boot. Boot is removed at about 6 weeks from surgery.

Patients having the left ankle operation will be able to drive an automatic car within two weeks. Those who have had operation on the right side will be able to drive after about 6 weeks. You are advised not to fly after surgery for about six weeks.

Recovery from the operation takes 6 to 12 weeks. Contact sports is permitted after 12 weeks.

What are the complications of the operation?

Ankle ligament reconstruction is a very successful operation. However, a small percentage of patients may have complications. Complications of the operation are:

- Infection
- Clots
- Wound problems
- Recurrent instability
- Stiffness
- Swelling
- Nerve damage
- Numbness
- Chronic pain syndrome