

What Type of Physical Exercise can I do after Foot and/or Ankle Surgery?

During the first week or two after major foot surgery it is likely that you will not be able to do any significant form of exercise. However, relatively quickly you can get back to some form of exercise although it often may not be the type of exercise that you would prefer. Listed below are a set of exercise programs you can consider as well as precautions you should observe. It is essential to review any planned exercise program with your treating physician.

Stretching and Strengthening

Stretching and strengthening your muscles (other than those below the knee on the operated extremity) is a good activity to do and can often be started immediately after surgery. Care is required to ensure that you are not loading the operated extremity (if you are supposed to be non-weight-bearing) and that you keep the operated foot elevated.

Swimming and Water aerobics

In theory water activities can be started relatively soon after surgery. Exercises such as swimming with a pull-buoy between your legs (so as to avoid kicking with your legs) and basic water aerobic exercises can often be quite beneficial. However, there are some precautions that you **MUST** observe including:

NEVER swim before all of your incisions are well healed! This usually takes a minimum of 4 weeks. If you get your wounds wet prior to adequate healing you run the risk of having the wounds breakdown which can be a very serious problem.

NEVER get a standard cast wet! Some patients have had success swimming with commercially available cast protectors. However, if a leak occurs you will have to get the whole cast changed. Wearing a wet cast is like wearing a wet sock around, it is likely to lead to a serious wound breakdown.

Pilates and Yoga

After you are allowed to begin weight-bearing you may be able to return to Pilates or yoga provided you modify some of the exercises so that they do not aggravate foot or ankle that has been operate on.

Exercise Bike

Riding an exercise bike with low resistance can be an effective way to maintain aerobic fitness relatively early in the recovery process. This is because cycling on an exercise bike only requires a fraction of your body weight to go through your foot and ankle (compared to 2-4 x body weight with running and walking). However, excessively elevating your hear rate in the recovery period may increase the swelling in the foot that has been operated on. Therefore if you begin an exercise bike program you will have to progress slowly.