

Advice for Flying

This information leaflet has been produced to provide our patients with an overview of their condition and what treatments they may expect. However, each person is different and the treatment you are offered will depend on your unique circumstances.



Stanmore
Foot & Ankle
Specialists

What is the risk of flying after surgery?

The risk of flying after surgery or injury depends on your individual risk factors and the type of surgery or injury.

If you are in a cast then there is a risk that the leg may swell up in the cast which can then become too tight. If that happens then the blood supply to the leg can become affected. This risk is higher if you are in a full cast.

There is also a risk of blood clots. Although the risk of blood clots after foot and ankle surgery is low, conditions where you are immobilised, and travelling on a *long-haul journey* (greater than 4 hours) increase this risk.

When is it safe to fly after Foot & Ankle surgery?

As a general guide, we would advise you not to fly for at least 2 weeks (and preferably for up to 4 weeks) following any elective foot and ankle surgery. This is to allow time for the wound and swelling to settle, your dressings to be changed and for your body to recover from the surgery.

The main risks of flying after this depend on what surgery you have had.

In some cases your surgeon may advise you not to fly for up to 3 months after your surgery, or to take special precautions if flying is unavoidable.

We would advise that you discuss any potential travel plans with your surgeon before your operation as your specific risk of flying will depend on what type of surgery you have had and your medical history.

What should I do to reduce my risks if I must fly?

If you must fly it is important that you inform and check with your airline as different airlines may have different policies.

Reducing the risks from your Cast

If you are in cast, then you should get your cast split, if appropriate, so that it can be removed if needed in an emergency. Sometimes it may be appropriate for you to go into a removable boot.

Reducing the risk of Blood clots

Simple things you can do reduce your risk of blood clots include:

- Avoid long periods of immobility. Walk around regularly – for example, a regular trip to the bathroom every 2–3 hours.
- Choose an aisle seat when feasible.
- Perform frequent calf muscle exercises.
- Do not place hand luggage where it restricts movement of legs and feet.
- Wear clothing that is comfortable and loose.
- Avoid tranquilisers, or sleeping tablets.
- Maintain a normal fluid intake (at least 250 ml every 2 hours) and avoid excessive alcohol.
- You can wear a flight stocking on your affected leg (if possible), and the other leg
- If you are on blood thinners after your surgery then make sure you continue to take them (in some cases you may be advised to take a higher dose before your flight)

What should I watch out for?

You should seek urgent medical advice (for example, from a local doctor, or the nearest Emergency Department) if you develop any of the following during or after the trip:

- Swollen (especially if one is more swollen than the other)
- Significant increase in leg pain in operated / injured leg
- Sudden pain in your other leg
- Breathing difficulties

You should also make sure you obtain adequate medical insurance before you travel.



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