

# Toe Amputation: Before Your Surgery

## What is a toe amputation?

A toe amputation is surgery to remove one or more toes. You will get medicine to help you relax and numb your foot. Then your doctor will make a cut (incision) to remove your toe. If you have healthy skin to cover the wound and have no signs of infection, the doctor will then try to close the wound.

You may have problems with walking or balance, especially if you lose your big toe. But you will not need an artificial toe. You may need to have special insoles made to fit in your shoes. These insoles are called orthotics.

You may go home on the day of surgery. Or you may need to stay in the hospital for a few days. This depends on how fast you recover and on your overall health.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## What happens before surgery?

Surgery can be stressful. This information will help you understand what you can expect. And it will help you safely prepare for surgery.

### Preparing for surgery

- Understand exactly what surgery is planned, along with the risks, benefits, and other options.
- Tell your doctors ALL the medicines, vitamins, supplements, and herbal remedies you take. Some of these can increase the risk of bleeding or interact with anesthesia.
- If you take blood thinners, such as warfarin (Coumadin), clopidogrel (Plavix), or aspirin, be sure to talk to your doctor. He or she will tell you if you should stop taking these medicines before your surgery. Make sure that you understand exactly what your doctor wants you to do.
- Your doctor will tell you which medicines to take or stop before your surgery. You may need to stop taking certain medicines a week or more before surgery. So talk to your doctor as soon as you can.
- If you have an advance directive, let your doctor know. It may include a living will and a durable power of attorney for health care. Bring a copy to the hospital. If you don't have one, you may want to prepare one. It lets your doctor and loved ones know your health care wishes. Doctors advise that everyone prepare these papers before any type of surgery or procedure.

## What happens on the day of surgery?

- Follow the instructions exactly about when to stop eating and drinking. If you don't, your surgery may be canceled. If your doctor told you to take your medicines on the day of surgery, take them with only a sip of water.
- Take a bath or shower before you come in for your surgery. Do not apply lotions, perfumes, deodorants, or nail polish.
- Do not shave the surgical site yourself.
- Take off all jewelry and piercings. And take out contact lenses, if you wear them.
- Wear loose-fitting clothes that will be easy to put on. You may have a large bandage on your foot.

## At the hospital or surgery center

- Bring a picture ID.
- The area for surgery is often marked to make sure there are no errors.
- You will be kept comfortable and safe by your anesthesia provider. The anesthesia may make you sleep. Or it may just numb the area being worked on.
- The surgery will take about 30 to 60 minutes.

## Going home

- Be sure you have someone to drive you home. Anesthesia and pain medicine make it unsafe for you to drive.
- You will be given more specific instructions about recovering from your surgery. They will cover things like diet, wound care, follow-up care, driving, and getting back to your normal routine.

## When should you call your doctor?

- You have questions or concerns.
- You don't understand how to prepare for your surgery.
- You become ill before the surgery (such as fever, flu, or a cold).
- You need to reschedule or have changed your mind about having the surgery.

### Where can you learn more?

Go to <http://www.healthwise.net/ed>

Enter **Z359** in the search box to learn more about "**Toe Amputation: Before Your Surgery.**"

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# Toe Amputation: What to Expect at Home

## Your Recovery

You had amputation surgery to remove one or more of your toes. For most people, pain improves within a week after surgery. You may have stitches or sutures. The doctor will probably take these out about 10 days after the surgery. You may need to wear a cast or a special type of shoe for about 2 to 4 weeks.

You may think you have feeling or pain where your toe had been. This is called phantom pain. It is common, and it may come and go for a year or longer. If you have this kind of pain, your doctor may prescribe medicine to treat it.

This care sheet gives you a general idea about how long it will take for you to recover. But each person recovers at a different pace. Follow the steps below to get better as quickly as possible.

## How can you care for yourself at home?

### Activity

- Rest when you feel tired. Getting enough sleep will help you recover.
- You may notice some changes in your balance when you walk. Your balance will improve over time.
- Try to walk each day if you are able. Start by walking a little more than you did the day before. Bit by bit, increase the amount you walk. Walking boosts blood flow and helps prevent blood clots.
- Prop up your foot and leg on a pillow when you ice it or anytime you sit or lie down during the next 3 days. Try to keep it above the level of your heart. This will help reduce swelling.
- Ask your doctor when you can drive again.
- You may shower, unless your doctor tells you not to. Keep the bandage dry. If the bandage has been removed, you can wash the area with warm water and soap. Pat the area dry.
- You will probably need to take about 4 weeks off from work or your normal routine. How much time you need to take off depends on the type of work you do and your overall health.

### Diet

- You can eat your normal diet. If your stomach is upset, try bland, low-fat foods like plain rice, broiled chicken, toast, and yogurt.
- You may notice that your bowel movements are not regular right after your surgery. This is common. Try to avoid constipation and straining with bowel movements. You may want to take a fiber supplement every day. If you have not had a bowel movement after a couple of days, ask your doctor about taking a mild laxative.

## Medicines

- Your doctor will tell you if and when you can restart your medicines. He or she will also give you instructions about taking any new medicines.
- If you take blood thinners, such as warfarin (Coumadin), clopidogrel (Plavix), or aspirin, be sure to talk to your doctor. He or she will tell you if and when to start taking those medicines again. Make sure that you understand exactly what your doctor wants you to do.
- Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
  - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
  - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.
- If your doctor prescribed antibiotics, take them as directed. Do not stop taking them just because you feel better. You need to take the full course of antibiotics.
- If you think your pain medicine is making you sick to your stomach:
  - Take your medicine after meals (unless your doctor has told you not to).
  - Ask your doctor for a different pain medicine.

## Incision care

- Your doctor will probably remove the bandages after several days. Or your doctor may have you remove your bandages at home. Do not touch the surgery area. Keep it dry.
- Do not soak your foot until your doctor says it is okay.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## When should you call for help?

**Call 911** anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You passed out (lost consciousness).
- You have sudden chest pain and shortness of breath, or you cough up blood.
- You have severe trouble breathing.

**Call your doctor now** or seek immediate medical care if:

- Your foot is cool or pale or changes color.
- You have numbness, tingling, or less feeling in your foot or your toes.
- You have pain that does not get better after you take pain medicine.
- You have loose stitches, or your incision comes open.
- Bright red blood has soaked through the bandage over your incision.
- You have signs of infection, such as:
  - Increased pain, swelling, warmth, or redness.
  - Red streaks leading from the incision.
  - Pus draining from the incision.

- A fever.

Watch closely for any changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You do not have a bowel movement after taking a laxative.

## **Where can you learn more?**

**Go to <http://www.healthwise.net/ed>**

Enter **X742** in the search box to learn more about **"Toe Amputation: What to Expect at Home."**

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