



IN THIS ISSUE

Ankle Arthritis
—cover

Cannabis Risks
—cover

From the Editor: Being a Friend When Times Are Hard
—p2

Newsbriefs
—p2-3

ACE Inhibitor or ARB?
—p3

Plant-Based Diet Benefits
—p5

Easing Depression
—p6

2021 Index
—p7

Ask the experts:
• Tongue Scraping
• Bunion Removal
• Pelvic Prolapse
—p8

Newsbriefs...CPAP Machine Recall: Are You Affected and What Should You Do?—p3

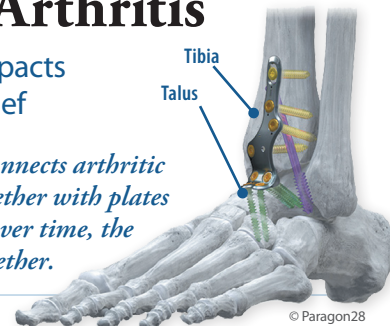
Surgical Options For Ankle Arthritis

If ankle arthritis causes severe pain and significantly impacts your mobility, surgical treatment options may bring relief

Arthritis doesn't affect just the hips and knees—smaller joints, such as the ankles, also are vulnerable to the condition. Like larger joints, your ankles rely on cartilage—a slippery substance that coats the ends of the bones in a joint—to help them move smoothly. If the cartilage wears away due to arthritis, your ankle bones eventually will grind together as you move, resulting in pain, swelling, and stiffness. Bone spurs (small bony outgrowths) also may develop.

Initially, you may be able to obtain relief from ankle arthritis through physical therapy, footwear modifications, ice packs, splints and braces that support the affected joint, pain-relieving drugs (such as anti-inflammatories), and cortisone injections. Rheumatoid arthritis likely will respond to disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs. But as your arthritis progresses, you may need to consider surgery. “Most people who undergo surgery for foot or ankle arthritis have an improvement in pain and find it easier to perform activities of daily living afterward,” says Meghan Kelly, MD, assistant professor of orthopedics and orthopedic

Arthrodesis connects arthritic joint ends together with plates and screws. Over time, the bones fuse together.



surgery at Mount Sinai. “However, depending on the surgical procedure in question, recovery times may be anything from four to nine months. For that reason, surgery should be seen as a last resort.”

Initial Strategy Mild arthritis may benefit from a minimally invasive (“keyhole” surgery) option called arthroscopic debridement. The procedure involves having a device called an arthroscope, which has a small camera lens at the tip, inserted into the joint via a small incision so that your doctor can view the area. Surgical tools are inserted through other small incisions and used to remove bone fragments, spurs, torn cartilage, and other tissue that might be impeding your joint function. “Debridement can be effective in a small number

Continues on p4

Get Informed About the Risks of Cannabis Use

More older adults are using the drug, but research suggests that few are aware of its risks

Cannabis use by older adults is increasing sharply in the United States. Some are using cannabis to help them manage health problems, and purchasing it from licensed state dispensaries. Known as “medical marijuana,” this is a less potent form of the drug—however, it can interact with medications taken by older adults. Other people are using cannabis for recreational purposes. Recreational cannabis contains a compound that alters your mood, perception, consciousness, and behavior, among other

potentially risky side effects. Recent research suggests that many older adults may be unaware of the harms associated with both medical marijuana and recreational cannabis, and also may be keeping their doctors in the dark about their cannabis use.

Managing Pain Researchers writing in the January issue of the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society (JAGS)* investigated cannabis use among 568 people ages 65 and older. About 15 percent said they had used cannabis

within the past three years. Of these individuals, half reported using the drug on a daily or weekly basis. Most used it to manage pain from age-related conditions such as arthritis, but others reported using it to help ease poor sleep, anxiety, and depression. Only 41 percent of cannabis users reported telling their health-care provider about their cannabis use. That is worrying, says Yasmin Hurd, PhD, director of the Addiction Institute at Mount Sinai. “All drugs have side effects, hence the reason for controlled clinical trials to

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BONES & JOINTS

ANKLE SURGERY *cont. from p1*

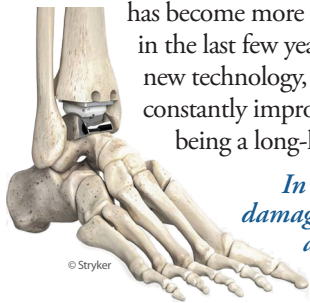
of people, but it won't restore the space in your joint or the cartilage loss that has already occurred," says Dr. Kelly.

Options for Severe Arthritis For severe arthritis, options include arthrodesis (also known as fusion), and ankle replacement.

"Arthrodesis involves removing the remaining cartilage in the joint in order to 'trick' your body into thinking the joint is fractured," Dr. Kelly explains. "The joint is then secured with plates and/or screws and the bone grows across the joint, fusing it." The ankle joint will not move anymore afterward, but Dr. Kelly says that numerous small joints in the foot often compensate.

In ankle replacement, the ends of the tibia (shin bone) and the talus (the top of the foot bone) are removed and replaced with metal joint pieces separated by a plastic spacer that ensures smooth motion of the prosthetic joint.

Dr. Kelly notes that ankle replacement has become more commonplace in the last few years. "As with any new technology, ankle implants are constantly improving, with the goal being a long-lasting, functional



In ankle replacement, damaged bone is removed and replaced with a prosthetic joint.

CANNABIS RISKS *cont. from p1*

determine not only efficacy, but potential harms," Dr. Hurd explains. "Unfortunately, not much research has been dedicated to studying cannabis use in older adults, so it is still unclear what the potential harmful side effects are in that population."

Risk Perception Low A more recent study (*JAGS*, May 26) suggests that many older adults who use cannabis for medical reasons may not be aware of the drug's risks. The study included 18,794 adults ages 65 and older. Between 2015 and 2019, the perceived risk associated with regular cannabis use decreased from 52.6 percent to 42.7 percent. Decreases in perceived risk were detected in particular among heavy drinkers and tobacco users. But perceptions of risk also decreased in people with cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, and chronic

joint," she says. "However, the longevity of ankle implants hasn't yet reached the level we see with hip and knee replacements." Research suggests that ankle replacements last for 10 to 15 years, compared with 15 to 20 years for knee and hip replacements.

Comparing Surgical Outcomes In a recent study, people with severe ankle arthritis demonstrated improvements in both pain and function with either an ankle arthrodesis or replacement. "However, there may have been further improvements in function from ankle replacement," Dr. Kelly observes. The study (*Journal of Bone & Joint Surgery*, May 19) included 517 people, mostly in their mid-50s and 60s. At four years postoperatively, both procedures showed improvements in key patient outcomes, but people who underwent ankle replacement reported better ankle function for activities of daily living and sports, and had better postoperative pain scores. Complete satisfaction with the results of their surgery was reported by 78 percent of ankle replacement recipients compared with 60 percent of those who underwent arthrodesis. People who had ankle replacement also had a lower rate of revision (repeat) surgery: 8.7 percent versus 17.5 percent. Dr. Kelly notes that study participants who underwent arthrodesis had more comorbidities, such as a history of prior ankle


obstructive pulmonary disease. People with these conditions often take several medications to manage their symptoms. If they also use cannabis, they may increase their risk of harmful drug interactions.

CBD vs. THC In the first study we reference, most participants reported using products containing only cannabidiol (CBD). CBD is the active ingredient in medical marijuana. It doesn't have the mind-altering effects of another chemical in cannabis (tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC)—however, research suggests that it interacts with several medications. "CBD is metabolized by similar liver enzymes as common medications used by older adults, including drugs for sleep, pain, and anxiety," Dr. Hurd confirms. "As such, CBD products have the potential to alter the effectiveness of these medications and impact your health in negative ways."

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

- ◆ **Ankle surgery is carried out under general or spinal anesthesia.** With debridement, you'll likely be able to go home on the day of the surgery, but the other options usually require you to stay in the hospital overnight and possibly longer. You also may need to spend time in a rehabilitation facility.
- ◆ **A splint is required** to stabilize your ankle after surgery.
- ◆ **You'll need to use crutches or a walker** for as long as your doctor recommends.
- ◆ **You'll be referred for physical therapy** once your doctor tells you that you can place your weight on your foot.

surgery, smoking, and obesity. It is possible these issues impacted their recovery and affected their satisfaction scores.

Choose the Right Surgeon If you decide to go ahead with ankle replacement, consult a surgeon who has expertise in ankle replacement. "The surgery is technically challenging and requires extensive knowledge of the available implants and the subtle foot deformities that may require attention during the surgery to ensure the best result," Dr. Kelly says. 

Sensible Precautions Dr. Hurd recommends you inform your health-care providers if you are using medical marijuana. Obtain a prescription from a doctor, and purchase the drug from a state dispensary. Cannabis products are not regulated by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration, and products purchased outside of state dispensaries may be stronger than you realize. Dr. Hurd adds that since so little is known about the effective dosage range of medical marijuana, it's best to start with a low dose and increase as necessary to achieve symptom relief.

If recreational cannabis is legal in your state, keep in mind that it contains THC. Older adults are more vulnerable than younger people when it comes to THC's intoxicating effects. It also may lower your blood pressure and affect your balance, raising your risk of falls—plus, it is associated with heart rhythm abnormalities. 