

Trauma & Orthopaedic Directorate

Osteotomy around the Knee

RISKS OF OSTEOTOMY

What are the risks of Knee Osteotomy?

No operation is completely without risk. The surgeon will explain the risks but serious problems are rare (less than 1%).

The information included below is there to increase your understanding of the risks of the operation. Most major and minor complications are included, but the list is not comprehensive. You can find out more about the risks involved from your surgeon or at your attendance to the Pre-Assessment clinic.

GENERAL RISKS

ANAESTHETIC RISKS

The large majority of knee osteotomy surgery is performed with the patient fully asleep, under general anaesthetic. Patients having this type of anaesthetic rarely have significant health problems. If these are present however, the operation may be carried out under regional anaesthesia. General anaesthesia is very safe and complications are extremely rare.

BLOOD CLOTS / THROMBOSES

The risk of blood clots either in the calf (deep vein thrombosis/ DVT) or in the lungs (pulmonary embolism P.E) is less than 0.05%. This risk is low as most patients having the surgery are up and about almost immediately. Good early mobility is the best way of preventing blood clots. Patients are also fitted with special AV boots which are a pneumatic compression device designed to reduce clot risk and swelling.

SURGERY SPECIFIC RISKS

INFECTION

Superficial wound infection is uncommon. This usually manifests itself as a slowly healing red wound, and reliably settles after treatment with antibiotics.

Deep infection in the bone itself is an extremely rare (less than 1%) but potentially very serious complication. It can require long treatment with antibiotics and further surgery.

FAILURE TO IMPROVE

Failing to relieve all or some of the patients' symptoms can occur with knee osteotomy. It can take some time to recover from surgery, but patients go on improving for a year to 18 months. It is unusual to have little or no improvement in symptoms, and exceptionally rare to be made worse by surgery.

BLEEDING

Osteotomy surgery always causes some bleeding. This is normally evident as bruising and/or swelling around the wound and down the leg. It is nothing to worry about and settles of its own accord. However, significant bleeding (haematoma) does occasionally occur and can cause wound problems. Very rarely this requires further surgery. Damage to major blood vessels behind the knee occurs exceptionally rarely. Patients on blood-thinning medications such as aspirin are more prone to bleeding during and after surgery. If you are taking blood-thinning medications, you will need to inform our staff in the Pre-Assessment clinic, as these medications may have to be stopped a number of days (7-10) prior to surgery.

DELAYED BONE HEALING

Osteotomy is a surgically-created fracture (broken bone) and therefore needs to heal. With modern fixation techniques bone healing starts very quickly and full weight can be put through the leg within the first few weeks. X-rays taken at 6 weeks, 3 months and onwards monitor the bone healing process. Occasionally the osteotomy heals slowly, and very rarely this can require further surgery in the form of bone grafting.

NERVE INJURY

Minor skin nerve damage can cause small areas of temporary or permanent numbness. Occasionally the wound can be sensitive or tender, but this normally settles with time. Serious nerve injury causing permanent damage is very rare indeed.

CONCLUSION

Knee osteotomy is a safe and well-proven operation. The risks involved are hugely out-weighed by its likely benefits. If you would like to further discuss surgery and the risks involved you can do so with your surgeon.

Important

Your operation may be cancelled if you have any of the following: - cuts, rashes, abrasions, or skin conditions (psoriasis, eczema etc) in-growing toenails, corns, leg ulcers or problems with your teeth or gums.

Symptoms of general illness may result in the anaesthetist recommending that the operation should be cancelled e.g. a cold on the day.